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Volume 198

Ancient Fables and Literary Genres

Texts, Contexts, Interactions

Edited by
Ursula Gärtner and Lukas Spielhofer

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Preface

This volume brings together the contributions to the second international conference on the ancient fable, which was organized at the University of Graz in 2022. As with our first conference in 2020, COVID still caused some difficulties. We are therefore all the more pleased that not only has a volume on the first conference been published in the meantime,[1] but that the results of our second conference are now also being made available in this volume. While the first volume's focus was on new approaches to the ancient fable in general, it quickly became clear that more groundwork is still needed in this field. The question of fable as a literary genre and its self-determination in its interactions with other genres seemed a promising starting point for further research.

Many people have contributed to the production of this volume, and we would like to thank them here: the University of Graz and its various institutions for sponsoring the conference and for their generous financial support in the production of this book; the student assistants, Linda Holanik, Jakob Zimmermann, and Elias Groß, for proofreading, the latter also for his work on the *Index locorum*; but above all the contributors to this project for their patience and the fruitful and gratifying collaboration. Special thanks go to the editors of *Trends in Classics* for including our work in the prestigious *Supplementary Volumes* series, to the anonymous referee for their insightful suggestions, and to *De Gruyter* for the excellent cooperation.

Ursula Gärtner, Lukas Spielhofer, Graz 2025

1 Gärtner, U./Spielhofer, L. (eds.) (2022), *Ancient Fables – Sour Grapes? New Approaches*, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York.

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Ursula Gärtner and Lukas Spielhofer

In cothurnis prodit Aesopus nouis: Ancient Fable and the Literary Genres

1 Introduction

As works of literature, ancient fables have long had to live in the shadows of scholarship in Graeco-Latin literature. Often deemed 'simple' or 'second-class', a large part of the fabulistic writing that survives from antiquity was overlooked in favour of other, seemingly more rewarding genres. Recent years, however, have seen a new and growing scholarly interest in ancient fable literature: a wealth of new editions, translations, and commentaries attest to this trend and signal a shift towards an approach that perceives fables as original literary products which inscribe themselves — and which can be read and understood — in the literary and cultural discourses of their time, an only newly-granted status which has been a basic premise in the study of other genres for a long time.

To better situate the more or less diffuse genre of ancient fable in the literary and cultural network of Graeco-Roman antiquity, this volume, which is the product of an international conference held in June of 2022 in Graz, seeks to examine some of the manifold ways in which fables interact with other ancient works of literature; particularly, it foregrounds phenomena of literary interaction on the level of genre as a category of analysis and a framework of meaning.

The following chapters of this book examine ancient fables in their relationship with other literary genres, whether it be poetry, such as comedy, epic, elegy, and epigram, or prose like philosophical texts, historiography, rhetoric, scientific works, novels, and different types of early Christian literature. They investigate genre boundaries, genre overlaps, and the interaction between the genres. Collectively, this volume looks at fables from both directions and illuminates what role fables as embedded narrative elements play in individual genres and, at the same time, sheds light on the different genres that ancient fable literature engages with through processes of allusion, adaptation, approximation, transformation or parody.

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2 What are genres?

Since the focus of this volume is on genre, it is important to define what we mean when we speak of this term as a literary category. In literary studies, genre is a highly contested concept whose nature somewhat eludes a strict systematization but which seems to be shared intuitively by certain groups in certain socio-historical contexts. On an aesthetic level, genre can be defined as a particular configuration of literary form and content, the relationship of which varies over time and space, as illustrated by historical discourses of literary criticism.[1] It has been described as "[a] recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and/or functional criteria".[2]

Since the beginning of Graeco-Roman literature, the concept of genre was mostly discussed in the context of taxonomical classifications, depending on whether an audience categorized certain types of text as belonging to the same group.[3] Some of the earliest theoretical reflections on the nature of genre in antiquity can be found in works concerned with literary criticism: in his *Republic*, Plato has Socrates develop a theory of poetry characterized by a distinction between diegetic and mimetic texts to which certain genres are then attributed.[4] Adopting a similar distinction between mimetic and amimetic poetry, Aristotle's *Poetics* are a testament to the fact that by the 4th century BCE, a strong understanding of literary genres must have been established. The work, which maintained a normative status for European intellectual history for centuries, outlines a taxonomy of *genus* based on criteria of form and effect, giving us detailed insights into how Aristotle conceives of mimetic poetical genres such as tragedy or epic. In Rome, the theoretical discussions surrounding genre were quickly adapted from the 3rd century BCE onwards and continued to exert influence on the reception and production of literature, as works on literary and rhetorical theory attest to: both Horace's *Ars poetica* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* offer catalogues of important genres and their characteristic forms and contents.[5]

In modern Graeco-Roman literary studies, it was above all Gian Biagio Conte's[6] structuralist definition of ancient genre that propelled the theoretical discussion in

1 For this historical perspective, cf. Michler 2022; for theoretical reflections on literary genres, cf. Pettersson 2006.

2 Duff 2000, xiii.

3 Cf. Hunter/Hardie 2006.

4 Pl. *Resp*. 3.392d–394c6.

5 Hor. *Ars P*. 73–85; Quint. *Inst*. 10.1.46–131.

6 Conte 1992; 1994.

recent decades: according to him, it is not possible to define genres purely based on formal criteria — such as the hexameter as characteristic of epic poetry, for example[7] — nor purely on the content of the texts. Instead, he offers a relational, systemic concept:

> Facts acquire meaning only in connection with one another. A genre is not made up by 'stuffing' it with isolated fragments of content, but by a total system of reciprocal, structured relations: the single element must enter into a constellation with others if it is to be transvalued and redefined until it too is able to connote, by itself, the presence of a whole genre.[8]

That this understanding of literary *genera* must have already existed in antiquity, Conte argues, is illustrated by examples in Augustan literature, such as Vergil's *Eclogues* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These works explicitly play with generic conventions by adopting characteristics of other genres under certain circumstances, such as connections motivated by the plot or subject matter. He uses this idea to explain the innovative character of Roman in relation to Greek literature: Roman authors must have been aware of a relation-based system of genre to be able to fill missing parts through generic innovation.[9] Conte also rejects an abstract, idealized conception of genre and highlights their real existence in concrete texts:

> Nothing would be more useless than to conceive of genres as simple, immobile abstractions, or as lifeless specimens to be collected in sterile bell jars: genre lives only in individual works. Just as we see not Man, but many individual human beings, whom we are capable of distinguishing from fleas or from horses, so too we see not the epic genre or the elegiac genre, but individual works which belong to particular genres, as we can recognize even in the case of hybrids.[10]

In turning away from an abstract and fixed idea of genre and embracing its inherently relativistic and systemic nature, Conte's definition bears striking parallels to perspectives inspired by modern findings in the field of cognitive sciences: from a cognitive point of view, genres constitute an example of how humans construct categories of perception as mental representations. They appear to be modelled on

7 Note, however, that ancient literary criticism strongly defined genre by these formal criteria; cf. e.g. Hunter/Hardie 2006.

8 Conte 1992, 107.

9 Cf. Conte 1992, 107–114; Schmitz 2006, 53.

10 Conte 1992, 122. Conte therefore pursued an approach more in line with our concerns than Cairns 1972, who 20 years earlier had not only disregarded diachronic change in a much-discussed approach, but also understood the concept of genre differently. With "genre" and "generic composition" he was referring only to "classifications in terms of content" and not to the formal categories of poetry such as "epic, lyric, elegy, or epistle" (6).

certain culturally-determined prototypes in the sense of 'best-practice' examples, and display much more fluidity and overlap than Aristotelian genre theory claims. This perspective shifts the view away from a hierarchical system of genres to which texts belong once they meet certain criteria, and instead focusses on the mental processes of recipients when engaging with the text.[11]

What becomes clear from this short overview is that the term 'genre' is contested and above all relative — it changes radically depending on who and at what time in history one asks. For the context of this volume, we would like to propose a notion of genre that lends itself less to the typological or taxonomical categorizations of ancient criticism. Instead, we would like to understand the term phenomenologically: as generic markers, certain elements in a literary text are able to elicit (often shared) expectations in a reader of a certain group of recipients. The text then meets, fails, or even contradicts these generic expectations, which may create an effect of tension or suspense, thereby contributing to the readerly experience. In this sense, the category of genre takes on a hermeneutic function in the reception and reader-oriented construction of meaning of a text.

3 What is a fable?

Like the general idea of genre, the notion of what constitutes a fable is strongly determined by cultural and historical factors. Ancient definitions in works concerned with rhetorical theory or literary criticism mostly describe fable (Gr.: αἶνος, λόγος, μῦθος or παράδειγμα; Lat.: *fabula*, *fabella*, *exemplum* or *apologus*) in rather general terms:[12] the earliest theoretical discussion in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* groups fables (λόγοι) with parables as one type of invented examples.[13] Similarly, Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria* classes fable as a type of fictitious exemplum (*ficta*) which persuades through pleasure (*voluptate*).[14] Adding to this are imperial collections of

11 Cf. Zymner 2013, 30–34.

12 For an overview, cf. van Dijk 1997, 38–78; Holzberg 2012; Gärtner 2015; 2020; Grethlein 2011; 2022.

13 Arist. *Rh*. 1393a28–31: παραδειγμάτων δὲ εἴδη δύο· ἓν μὲν γάρ ἐστιν παραδείγματος εἶδος τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενομένα, ἓν δὲ τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν. τούτου δὲ ἓν μὲν παραβολὴ ἓν δὲ λόγοι, οἷον οἱ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυκοί ("There are two kinds of examples; namely, one which consists in relating things that have happened before, and another in inventing them oneself. The latter are subdivided into comparisons or fables, such as those of Aesop and the Libyan"; transl. Freese/Striker).

14 Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.19: *illae quoque fabellae quae, etiam si originem non ab Aesopo acceperunt* (*nam uidetur earum primus auctor Hesiodus*), *nomine tamen Aesopi maxime celebrantur, ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum, qui et simplicius quae ficta sunt audiunt, et capti uoluptate facile iis quibus delectantur consentiunt*; ("Also those fables which, even if they did not find

rhetorical exercises such as the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon and Aphthonius, which provide us with the most concise ancient definitions of fable:

> Μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν
> (Theon *Prog*. 72 Spengel)
>
> Fable is a fictitious story that illustrates reality/truth.[15]
> (Transl. U.G./L.S.)

As Gert-Jan van Dijk has pointed out, most ancient accounts agree that fables are fictitious, metaphorical stories. However, conflicting opinions in regard to other features exist, such as to typical characters, forms, or functions of fabulistic storytelling.[16] The fables in the extant imperial collections and other works of ancient literature vary greatly in both form and content: as for their formal structure, fables are generally short and written in prose or verse; in some cases, they display features of formulaic language to signal an embedding into an argumentative context or demarcate a narrative section from a pro- or epimythium. In terms of content, the characters in these texts appear as (anthropomorphic) animals, humans, gods, plants, or even speaking objects — and contrary to popular belief, a significant number of ancient fables does not feature any animals at all.[17] With regard to subject matter, they are equally varied. Among other things, fables comprise stories illustrating proverbs or aphorisms, anecdotes, myths, aetiological or satirical stories or parodies, which connect them to a range of different genres that share these topics. Finally, there is variety in the effect that fables display: their function is often difficult to ascertain without a concrete narrative context or pro-/epimythium. This suggests that as rhetorical elements, fables favour a plurality of readings, which is

---

their origin in Aesop (for Hesiod seems to have been the first to write them), are nevertheless most known under the name of Aesop, usually move the minds of the rustic and uneducated in particular, who understand more easily what is fictitious and who, captured by pleasure, readily agree with those by which they are entertained"; transl. U.G./L.S.).

15 Cf. also Aphth. *Prog*. 10.1 Rabe [= 21 Spengel] : Ὁ μῦθος ποιητῶν μὲν προῆλθε, γεγένηται δὲ καὶ ῥητόρων κοινὸς ἐκ παραινέσεως. Ἔστι δὲ μῦθος λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν ("The mythical fable of poets came first, but it has also become a shared good of rhetoricians from the exhortation. A fable is a fictitious story that illustrates truth/reality; transl. U.G./L.S.). Note that the question as to how translate ἀλήθεια is highly contested — while some scholars argue for 'truth' (e.g. Perry 1965, xx), others assume it to mean 'reality' (e.g. van Dijk 1997, 5; Grethlein 2011, 321).

16 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 71–78.

17 Cf. Grethlein 2011, 321: "Häufig sind die Protagonisten Tiere, aber nicht wenige antike Fabeln haben auch Pflanzen, Menschen und Götter als Akteure" ("Animals are frequent protagonists, yet quite a few ancient fables also feature plants, humans, and gods as actors"). Note, however, that modern definitions see this as constitutive for the genre, cf. e.g. Zymner 2009, 234.

also reflected in the range of possible use cases recorded in ancient accounts — as means of persuasion, moral didaxis, illustration, entertainment or expression of opinion.[18]

For this reason, contemporary fable scholarship has rightfully highlighted the trouble of finding a uniform definition, since these texts confront us with a multitude of realities and especially since the very notion of the term fable changes over time.[19] Bearing this in mind, it seems all the more difficult to map modern theories influenced by Jean de la Fontaine's or Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 17th and 18th-century reflections of fable as a purely allegorical, moralistic animal story onto the breath of material found in ancient fable collections.[20] In the last decades, scholars have put forward different configurations of the outlined categories to define fable, with some leaning more towards ancient and others favouring more modern discourses.[21] In one of the most recent contributions to the discussion, Niklas Holzberg calls fable a form of illustrative storytelling — emphasising the common denominator of comparison also found in some of the ancient definitions.[22]

Furthermore, it has been noted that fable as a 'fuzzy' literary term without well-defined edges shares parallels with similar narrative devices such as proverbs, parables, similes, comparisons, exempla, anecdotes, myths, or even fairy tales.[23] In many cases, a clear distinction cannot be drawn, a fact which has recently led to innovative approaches that consider these elements together as fluid forms of

18 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 73–76.

19 Dithmar 1997, 165: "Eine allgemeingültige Definition der Fabel von ihrem Ursprung bis zur Gegenwart gibt es nicht, da sich jede definitorische Bestimmung an einzelnen Autoren, Epochen oder Typen der Fabel orientiert." ("There is no universally valid definition of fable from its origins to the present day, as each definition is based on individual authors, epochs, or types of fable.") For a historical overview of different theories of fable, cf. Dithmar 2000.

20 Cf. Holzberg 2012, 21–22.

21 Perry 1952, ix, names their fictitious nature, a narrative set in the past, and their argumentative effect as typical of Aesopic fable; Zymner 2009, 234, highlights fictionality, anthropomorphization, and a signal of application ("Anwendungssignal") as constitutive of the genre; Grethlein 2011, 321, differentiates a generic nucleus defining fable as "fiktive Erzählungen mit metaphorischem Charakter" ("fictitious stories with metaphorical character") from a set of more or less facultative features, such as the presence of certain characters, a short length with a fixed narrative structure, or an argumentative or persuasive effect.

22 Holzberg 2012, 21: "Form des exemplifizierenden Erzählens".

23 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 78; Zimmermann 2023, 110–115.

storytelling.[24] Several chapters in this volume will illustrate and explore these formal boundaries.

With regard to the general genre discussion outlined above, it is important to note that fable seemingly does not play a role as a literary *genus* in the strict, typological sense — and it is conspicuous that neither ancient nor modern definitions focus too much on the discussed categories of form and content when describing it.[25] But fables certainly constitute a type of text or textual element recognizable to a group of recipients — otherwise all allusions to fables in ancient literature would not exist. Furthermore, the generic affiliation with the fable tradition creates literary expectations in readers, such as an evocation of a (pseudo-)didactic frame or a mixture of instruction and entertainment, phenomena which are both addressed in a humorous, self-reflexive manner by Phaedrus in the prologue to his first book of fables; there, he inserts himself in the Aesopic tradition and proclaims that his poems will raise laughter and give life advice, suggesting that these are topical conventions an ancient audience would have expected of fable literature.[26] We thus deem it valid to consider the genre of fable in a phenomenological sense as a system of — more or less variable — generic markers that enter into a dialogue with their audience and evoke a hermeneutic response according to certain generic patterns.

4 Examples

Now that we have sketched out some definitory boundaries of the fable genre, it is necessary to acknowledge that, in line with Conte's conception of genre, the contributions in this volume are not so much interested in fable as an isolated and 'ideal' concept, but rather in its various phenotypical expressions that emerge through interactions with other texts — both in the sense of fable being used as a narrative element in 'container works' of different literary genres and as a self-standing work of art which absorbs or transforms generic features of different works. In both cases, it is worthwhile to reflect on the function of such insertions or transformative approximations and to explain what their effect on an audience might be.

24 Cf. for example Strong 2021, a contribution to New Testament studies which blurs the boundaries of fable and parable to achieve a new reading of the parables of the Gospel of Luke in the context of the imperial fable tradition.

25 Cf. however the moral component which could correspond to the category of effect in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

26 For Phaed. 1 *prol.* Z. [= G.], cf. Gärtner 2015, 59–68.

For an example of what form a fable inserted into a text of another genre can take, we can examine a passage taken from 2nd-century CE Greek physician and philosopher Sextus Empiricus' skeptical treatise *Adversus mathematicos*:

> Πρὸς τούτοις ὅταν λέγωσι τὸ μὲν "ἡμέρα ἔστιν" ἀξίωμα ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἶναι ἀληθές, τὸ δὲ "νὺξ ἔστι" ψεῦδος, καὶ τὸ μὲν "οὐχὶ ἡμέρα ἔστι" ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ "οὐχὶ νὺξ ἔστιν" ἀληθές, ἐπιστήσει <τις>, πῶς μία οὖσα καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ ἀπόφασις τοῖς μὲν ἀληθέσι προσελθοῦσα ψευδῆ ταῦτα ποιεῖ, τοῖς δὲ ψευδέσιν ἀληθῆ. **ὅμοιον γάρ ἐστι τοῦτο τῷ κατὰ τὸ Αἰσώπειον αἴνιγμα Σειληνῷ, ὃς ὁρῶν τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνθρωπον χειμῶνος ὥρᾳ καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ ψύχεσθαι τὰς χεῖρας [ἐμφυσῶντα] καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ καίεσθαι ἐμφυσῶντα τῷ στόματι, ἔφη μὴ ἂν ὑπομεῖναι τοιούτῳ θηρίῳ συζῆν ἐξ οὗ τὰ ἐναντιώτατα προέρχεται.** [104] ὧδε γὰρ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπόφασις τὰ μὲν ὑπάρχοντα ἀνύπαρκτα ποιοῦσα, τὰ δὲ ἀνύπαρκτα ὑπαρκτά, τεραστίου φύσεως μετείληφεν.
>
> (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 8.103–104 M./M.)

> Furthermore, when they say that the proposition "It is day" is at present true but "It is night" false, and "It is not day" false but "It is not night" true, one will ponder how a negative, which is one and the same, when attached to things true makes them false, and attached to things false makes them true. **For this is like the Silenus in the riddle of Aesop who, on seeing the same man in the winter season blowing with his mouth both to save his hands from being cold, and to save himself from being burnt, declared that he could not endure to live with a beast of a kind such that out of him proceed things most opposite.** Thus, too, the negative itself, by making existing things non-existent and non-existents existent, partakes of the miraculous.
>
> (Transl. Bury, with modifications)

In this extract, Sextus Empiricus discusses the paradoxical nature of linguistic negation and its ontological implications. To make this in his view 'miraculous' (τεραστίου φύσεως) abstract concept, which influences the value of different statements in completely opposite ways, more tangible, the author employs the Aesopic fable of the "Wanderer and the Satyr", introduced as part of a comparison (cf. ὅμοιον). This embedded fable, which also features as a standalone text in ancient collections,[27] sees a human wanderer and a satyr meet in a wintry landscape; at first, the wanderer blows into his hands to try and warm them up from the freezing cold outside. However, when the satyr invites him to his cave and offers him hot food and wine as a gesture of hospitality, he witnesses the human blow on the boiling food to cool it down to a consumable temperature. Shocked by this seemingly unnatural, contradictory power, the satyr throws the wanderer out again into the cold. In Sextus Empiricus' version, the fable serves an illustrative function, it supports the preceding argument to which the author circles back in the concluding

27 Such as Aesop. 35 P. [= Hsr; 60 Ch.] or Avian. 29; cf. also Arist. [*Pr.*] 964a10–18; Plut. *Mor*. 947f for allusions to the fable in other literary works.

sentence at the end of the passage and the beginning of which even bears traces of formulaic language similar to an epimythium (cf. ὧδε γὰρ). As the example shows, fabulistic narratives can be used in literary texts for argumentative or illustrative purposes in a similar way to other rhetorical elements and figures of speech such as exempla, similes, parables or metaphors. In this case, an audience's interpretation and evaluation of the fable strongly depends on the literary context in which it is embedded.[28]

In contrast to this, fables can also become 'containers' themselves and absorb or accommodate elements of other literary genres. Examples for this process are found in the fable collections of the imperial age, which constitute self-standing books of poetry. Let us consider the following fable in Phaedrus' fifth book of *fabulae Aesopiae*:

Tu qui, nasute, scripta destringis mea
Et hoc iocorum legere fastidis genus,
Parua libellum sustine patientia,
Seueritatem frontis dum placo tuae
Et in cothurnis prodit Aesopus nouis.
Utinam nec umquam Pelii nemoris iugo
Pinus bipenni concidisset Thessala,
Nec ad professae mortis audacem uiam
Fabricasset Argus opere Palladio ratem,
Inhospitalis prima quae ponti sinus
Patefecit in perniciem Graium et barbarum!
Namque et superbi luget Aeetae domus,
Et regna Peliae scelere Medeae iacent,
Quae saeuum ingenium uariis inuoluens modis
Illic per artus fratris explicuit fugam,
Hic caede patris Peliadum infecit manus.
Quid tibi uidetur? "Hoc quoque insulsum est" ait
"Falsoque dictum; longe quia uetustior
Aegaea Minos classe perdomuit freta
Iustoque uindicauit exemplo impetum".
Quid ergo possum facere tibi, lector Cato,
Si nec fabellae te iuuant nec fabulae?
Noli molestus esse omnino litteris,

28 One might argue that the pro- and epimythia, which regularly appear in fable collections and whose origin is often unclear, bear witness to the fluid nature of fabulistic narratives in light of changing contexts — while they provide a (more or less ambiguous) basis of interpretation, removing them often shifts a reader's focus on different aspects of the fable within a new interpretative frame. In the above example, the final sentence serves a very similar function of contextualising and interpreting the embedded fable narrative.

Maiorem exhibeant ne tibi molestiam.
Hoc illis dictum est, qui stultitia nauseant
Et ut putentur sapere caelum uituperant.
(Phaed. 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.])

You, nosey one, who scorn my writings and feel reluctance to read this kind of jesting, bear this little book with a little patience as long as I smooth the severity of your brow and Aesop appears in new cothurns.
Oh, if only the spruce had never fallen through the double axe, the Thessalian one, on the crest of the Pelian grove, and Argus had not carpentered a ship with Palladian art for the bold path of obvious death, which was the first to open the bays of the inhospitable sea to the ruin of the Greeks and barbarians! For both the arrogant house of Aeetes mourns, and the kingdom of Pelias lies in ruin through the crime of Medea, who — concealing her wild mind in various ways — made her escape possible there with the help of her brother's limbs, and stained her hands here by murdering the father of the Peliades.
How do you like that? "This too is witless," he says, "and falsely spoken; because much earlier Minos conquered the Aegean Sea with his fleet and avenged himself with just punishment for an attack." So what can I do for you, reader Cato, if you like neither my fables nor my tragedies? Be not at all troublesome to literature, lest it cause you greater discomfort. This is said for those who show disgust because of their stupidity and, in order to be considered intelligent, blame heaven.

(Transl. U.G./L.S.)

This unusual fable, for which no parallel versions exist in ancient collections, engages heavily with the generic conventions of tragedy.[29] Addressing an anonymous critic characterized as a Cato in the exposition (1–5), the speaker reacts to his criticism of the fables, asks him to be patient and offers him a piece of his Aesop in tragic buskins instead: *Et in cothurnis prodit Aesopus nouis*. Suddenly, he breaks out into a prologue to a Roman tragedy *Medea* (6–16), which is set off from the rest of the poem not only by subject matter — Phaedrus' account closely follows both Euripides' and Ennius' prologues to their versions of the play — but also by metre, seeing as it consists mostly of tragic trimeters instead of Phaedrus' usual iambic senarius. A reader familiar with the generic tradition of tragedy might be inclined to laugh at the fact that Phaedrus dresses up Aesop as Medea's nurse who usually speaks the prologue in other versions of the play. Furthermore, the fable's engagement with the tradition of this prominent example of tragedy is also reflected in a number of lexical references and in the fact that the passage mirrors the beginnings of both Euripides' and Ennius' prologues. Following his recital, the speaker

29 For Phaedrus' playful take on tragedy in this fable, cf. Gärtner 2017; on fable and drama, see also Gärtner's, Pütz's, and Mordeglia's contributions in this volume.

interrupts himself (17–20), addresses the critic again and asks his opinion; when the critic repeats his disapproval of the poem but bases it on the factual value of the content instead of style, the speaker answers with a rhetorical question that concludes the fable (21–24) and suggests that he stop engaging with literature altogether; an epimythium (25–26) then offers a generalising interpretation.

Phaedrus' prologue to his *Medea* as part of this fable displays typical generic markers that an ancient audience would have expected from tragedy on the level of form and content, such as subject matter, characters, metre, lexical allusions or tragic style and pathos. But in the context of fable, the speaker's goal is not the serious composition of tragedy but solely to poke fun at his opposite, the mean critic. The abrupt changes in content, register, and communicative situation from fable to tragedy and back again within the poem are motivated and supported by the generic expectations that the different sections elicit — they are a driving force behind its parodistic, comical nature. With this fable, then, Phaedrus inscribes himself in a tradition of tragic parodies, a caricature of literary criticism, and the discourse surrounding paratragedy more generally.

5 Some notes on methodology

These examples are representative of the kinds of phenomena that the following chapters discuss. Considering the breadth of texts and topics covered in this volume, one cannot hope to provide a unified methodological blueprint which maps onto every chapter to the same degree. However, what connects all the contributions collected here is a focus on the concept of genre as an analytical category for literary interpretation. They examine the interrelation between the ancient fable — as in the contextualized or independent forms presented above — and works that are traditionally associated with genres other than fable literature. Depending on individual standpoints, their insights shed light on different aspects of how texts construct meaning *vis-à-vis* an audience and their generic expectations.

Of course, the following chapters approach these questions from various perspectives and degrees of granularity: while in some cases, statements on the parameters of a whole group of texts can be made, other contributions present results that aim to advance the understanding of specific works or passages thereof through the analytical potential of genre. Moreover, not all examples will reveal their generic interactions with the same intensity — they can be pronounced and explicit as in Phaedrus' fable presented above or realized in a more loose or implicit manner. Thus, we cannot claim to offer an exhaustive overview of all literary

genres as they relate to and interact with the ancient fable — nor would that be our intention.

Instead, we are convinced that through the fruitful combination of different analytical scopes and areas of Graeco-Latin literature it is possible to highlight tendencies in some ancient texts more comprehensively and in more detail. Such an approach promises to open up new perspectives also on established literary genres with a stronger traditional footing in classical scholarship, which result from observing them through the lens of fable; at the same time, this volume serves to illuminate the position of fable literature in the broader literary history of antiquity and further motivate a reflection on the modern concept of genre as an open and dynamic analytical tool rather than a normative signpost of typological in- or exclusion.

6 Overview

Since genre represents an essential aspect of all the contributions presented here, it will not surprise readers to see that generic considerations also play a role in the structure of this volume. The following chapters are grouped together into sections that each focus on the interrelation between fables and specific genres of the Graeco-Roman tradition (or a group thereof), broadly conceived. Of course, not every single contribution neatly fits in one — and only one — category, seeing as many chapters touch on several different genres while others are more strongly bound together by thematic or historical rather than generic considerations; furthermore, not every literary genre can be covered, which necessarily makes the list of discussed texts a selective one. Nevertheless, our hope is that the presented arrangement provides readers with an informative overview of the ways in which fables pervade the literary culture of Graeco-Roman antiquity and beyond.

Following this introduction, the first section of the volume is dedicated to the relationship between fable and narrative or didactic epic. In his contribution, **Bruno Currie** discusses the famous fable of the "Hawk and the Nightingale" embedded in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and describes it as an abbreviated version of a fabular narrative present in the later collections of the Aesopic tradition and alluded to in Classical Greek literature. **Keating McKeon** on the other hand examines elements of fable in Homeric epic, particularly in the 24th book of the *Iliad*, thereby probing the permeable boundaries between a comparative epic simile and a condensed fable narrative.

Section two is concerned with the connection between fables and elegiac poetry. **Giovanni Zago** looks at intergeneric relationships in the fables of Avianus: he discusses the implications of considering intertextuality — in general, but

particularly with regard to the elegiac tradition — in the constitution of Avianus' text, which can provide helpful tools to solve uncertainties in textual transmission and inspire new emendations. Following from this, **Christopher Poms** sheds light on echoes of Roman love elegy in the fables of Avianus, focusing on the collection's two opening poems and its accompanying paratextual epistle and highlighting possible metapoetic effects.

The volume's third section examines the interrelation between fable and comedy. **Babette Pütz** discusses the use of fables in Aristophanes' *Vespae*, *Pax*, and *Lysistrata* as narrative elements which highlight pivotal themes of the plays — age dynamics, poetics, and gender, respectively. In her contribution, **Ursula Gärtner** traces references to comedy and their function in the fables of Phaedrus, touching on aspects of form, motifs, characters, and the saturnalian element common to both genres. Finally, **Caterina Mordeglia**, using the example of Phaedrus and Publilius Syrus, explores the close connection between fable and the Roman mime and reflects on the methodological complexity of pinpointing parallels to genres of which we have only fragmentary evidence.

The following section four focuses on the relationship between fables and various prose genres such as works on philosophy, natural history, historiography, or rhetoric. In her chapter, **Hedwig Schmalzgruber** discusses parallels between fables and examples of nature writing of the imperial period such as the works of Pliny the Elder or Aelianus, emphasizing the poetic realism of certain animal depictions in Phaedrus' collection with regard to content and style. Following this, **Claudia Luchetti** looks at Aesopic fabulistic echoes and their function in Plato's *Phaedo* and illustrates how this dialogue's argumentative framework builds on narrative patterns connected to the figure of Aesop. **Vittorio Bottini** then explores generic interactions between the fables of Babrius and Plato's *Phaedo* and *Politicus* and their significance for the fabulist's poetic programme (e.g. with regard to fictionalization). **Damian Pierzak** discusses the influence of rhetorical theory on the use of fables as a means of persuasion in ancient literature and evaluates the question whether they were actually used in ancient oratory before the advent of the fable collections of the imperial period. Rounding off this section, **Simona Martorana** traces the adaptation of the famous fable of the "Belly and the Members" across different literary genres, such as historiography, biography, *Fachliteratur*, Socratic dialogues or self-standing fable collections, from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

The fifth section deals with the interaction between fables and the ancient novel. In her contribution, **Silvia Mattiacci** highlights different parallels between the fables of Phaedrus and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* to illustrate programmatic and thematic convergences between ancient 'popular' genres.

Section six is concerned with the connection between fable and the ancient epigram. **Lukas Spielhofer** examines the presence and function of generic markers in the fables of Babrius, focusing on both epic and epigrammatic poetry to question the broader notion of genre in the fabulistic tradition. The influence of epigrams is also a defining question in **Margot Neger's** chapter which illuminates the parallels between the fables of Avianus and different types of ancient 'minor poetry' with regard to formal aspects, motifs, characters, and poetology. Finally, **Federica Scognamiglio's** contribution focuses on the role of fable in the development of new, self-standing genres in the Byzantine period — such as by way of *metaphrasis*, as is the case in a book of fabulistic-epigrammatic four-line poetry (*Tetrasticha*) by Ignatios the Deacon.

The volume's seventh and final section focuses on the relationship between the ancient fable and different genres stemming from the tradition of (early) Christian literature. Bridging the gap from the preceding chapters, **Maria Christodoulou's** contribution looks at generic elements of and allusions to animal fable in Gregory of Nazianzus' writings, particularly his epistles and Christian epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology*. Shifting the focus to biblical texts, **Justin Strong** sheds light on the techniques and functions of embedding fables (i.e. parables) in the Gospels of the New Testament as adaptations of the fabulistic genre in different cultural contexts. In her chapter, **Montserrat Camps-Gaset** discusses the role of anthropomorphized speaking animals in the *Acta Thomae* and highlights parallels between fable literature and the apocryphal writings of the Acts of the Apostles genre.

As already mentioned, the questions outlined here could be extended to other genres; with this volume, we aim to provide a first impression of fabulistic genre interactions and encourage further research. We hope that future studies will offer even more exciting and multifaceted insights into the world of ancient fable.

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Part I: **Fable and Epic**

Bruno Currie

Hesiod's Fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (*Op*. 202–212)

Abstract: This paper investigates the dynamics involved in the embedding of the fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. This was evidently a traditional fable, very selectively treated by Hesiod (section 1). The hawk should not be regarded as articulating the moral of the traditional fable ("might is right"), tralatitiously handled by Hesiod (section 2): more probably, Hesiod suppresses a 'second act', in which the rapacious hawk got his just deserts. This two-act version is attested in the medieval Ademar-codex of Phaedrus (section 3), and perhaps already presupposed in Euripides' Hecuba (section 4). Section 5 speculates about the various adaptations undergone by a presumptively original fable both within the fabular tradition itself (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.]; Ad. 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.]) and when embedded in *Works and Days* and *Hecuba*. Section 6 aims to reveal the sophistication and complexity of the interaction between Hesiod's fabular narrative and his wider paraenetic poem. The conclusion (section 7) considers the role played by the genre of the embedding text (in this case, instructional poem versus tragedy).

1 Introduction

Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (*Op*. 202–212) is the earliest attested fable in Greek literature. Like the next earliest attested fable, Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle" (*fr*. 172–181 Swift), it is an embedded fable. It offers an excellent opportunity to investigate the interactions that are possible between an embedded fable and its embedding narrative.

The fable in question is as follows:

Νῦν δ' αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι[1] καὶ αὐτοῖς·
ὣδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν ἀηδόνα ποικιλόδειρον
ὕψι μάλ' ἐν νεφέεσσι φέρων ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς·
ἣ δ' ἐλεόν, γναμπτοῖσι πεπαρμένη ἀμφ' ὀνύχεσσι,
μύρετο· τὴν ὅ γ' ἐπικρατέως πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
"δαιμονίη, τί λέληκας; ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων·

1 A variant reading νοέουσι is attested, but has no interpretative consequences.

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τῇ δ' εἶς ἥ σ' ἂν ἐγώ περ ἄγω καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν·
δεῖπνον δ', αἴ κ' ἐθέλω, ποιήσομαι ἠὲ μεθήσω.
ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλῃ πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν· 210
νίκης τε στέρεται πρός τ' αἴσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει."
ὣς ἔφατ' ὠκυπέτης ἴρηξ, τανυσίπτερος ὄρνις.
(Hes. *Op*. 202–212)

Now I will tell a cautionary tale to the barons, though they know it themselves.
This is how the hawk addressed the dapple-necked nightingale
as he bore her high in the clouds after seizing her up in his talons
— she was lamenting piteously as she was pierced by his curved talons —
he addressed her roughly as follows:
"Wretch, why are you screeching? One who is far stronger has you in his grasp.
You will go wherever I lead you, minstrel though you are.
I shall make you my supper if I want or I shall let you go.
He is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors.
Not only does he miss out on the victory, he suffers pains in addition to humiliation."
Thus spoke the swift-flying hawk, long-winged bird.
(Transl. B.C.)

Though the earliest attested fable in Greek tradition, this already has the appearance of being a traditional fable. In the first place, this seems to be implied by νῦν δ' αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς ("though they know it themselves", 202), a standard type of expression, whose gist is: "what I am going to say is something you already know".[2] The likely implication of this phrase is that the fable itself is known, that is, the specific fabular narrative of the hawk and the nightingale. Also possible, but less likely, is that Hesiod's phrase αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς intends that the αἶνος is known (or at least will be intelligible) to the barons only in respect of the lesson it imparts, in terms of its exhortation to them to comport themselves in a particular way, as if the speaker/fabulist wishes to be understood to be "preaching to the converted".[3]

Second, the narratee is plunged into this fabular narrative *in medias res*.[4] What setting of the stage there is transpires only incidentally to the narrative and analeptically.[5] The narrative focusses immediately on the hawk's address to the nightingale, only subsequently adding the details that he had snatched her up in his claws

2 Braswell 1988, 227. See also Dalfen 1994/1995, 162–163.

3 Cf. Lefkowitz 2014, 8: "who'll not need it explained"; West 1984, 107: "an αἶνος which will not be lost on them"; Ford 2002, 74: "ainos that kings will understand"; Macleod 1982, 47: "a polite convention which veils the often distasteful business of giving advice", with parallels in n. 2; cf. West 1978, 205–206.

4 Daly 1961, 47; Lonsdale 1989, 405; Zanker 2009, 17; Hunter 2014, 242.

5 Daly 1961, 47, 50.

and that she was lamenting. Hesiod's narration thus evidently corresponds not to the opening of a fabular narrative (e.g. '*A* hawk addressed *a* nightingale as follows [...]'), but to the middle of such a narrative ('*The* hawk addressed *the* nightingale as follows [...]', 203). The absence of the definite article (functioning as a demonstrative) makes the use of the nouns ἴρηξ and ἀηδόνα in 203 unlike *Il*. 20.147 τὸ κῆτος, ("the [*sc*. well-known] monster"), where the inclusion of the definite article clearly signals that reference is made to the monstrous protagonist of a well-known mythological episode.[6] Equally, however, Hesiod's use of these nouns is crucially unlike what we find in a typical Aesopic narrative beginning with an article-less noun, e.g. the Aesopic fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.], quoted in full below), which begins: ἀηδών [...], ("*A* nightingale [...]"). The *in medias res* narration and the casual introduction of its animal protagonists (the hawk, the nightingale) indicates that we are dealing with a familiar fabular narrative, one that has been shorn of its opening.[7]

There is also some reason to think that it has been shorn of its ending, too. In fables where a character delivers the 'closing statement' (e.g. the *skolion* 892 *PMG*), no speech-capping formula follows the direct speech.[8] The inclusion here of a speech-capping formula at the end of the narrative (ὣς ἔφατ' ὠκυπέτης ἴρηξ, 212; mirroring ὧδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν, 202) creates an expectation that the narrative has a continuation, here suppressed, in which the hawk is to receive an answer of some sort.[9] Not only, therefore, would the narratee be plunged into this narrative *in medias res*, they would also be hauled out of it, as it were, *ex mediis rebus*. The narrative is presented as an excerpt from a substantially larger narrative context, knowledge of which is explicitly presupposed on the part of the internal narratees (the barons), and implicitly on the part of the external narratee. The declared intention to "tell a fable to the barons" (202) materializes as a quotation just of "What the Hawk Said to the Nightingale".[10] All preceding and succeeding action falls away.[11]

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6 See already schol. A *Il*. 20.147a1: ὅτι οὕτως εἴρηκε σὺν τῷ ἄρθρῳ «τὸ κῆτος», ὡς παραδεδομένης τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς περὶ τοῦ κήτους ("he [*sc*. Homer] expressed it thus with the article, τὸ κῆτος, because the story concerning the monster was a traditional one"); Edwards 1991, 307, glossing τὸ κῆτος as "the sea-monster <we all know about>".

7 Dalfen 1994/1995, 172–173; Hunter 2014, 242–243: "This fable, then, is not complete in itself, as fables in literature usually are".

8 Cf. Holzberg 2002, 24.

9 Führer 1967, 55–56. This implication of the attributive discourse is not always noted (e.g. by Koning 2022, 70). Thus *Op*. 210–211 is formally *un*like those fables where the moral is put in the mouth of the last speaker (*pace* e.g. Dalfen 1994/1995, 172–173; Holzberg 2002, 21; Finglass 2011, 463).

10 Bona Quaglia 1973, 132.

11 Cf. Bona Quaglia 1973, 134–135.

2 Does the hawk deliver the moral (viz. 'might is right')?

In addition to or in lieu of the epimythium given in narrator-text at the end of the narrative, it is a common convention of fables that one of the characters may deliver the moral (γνώμη) in direct speech. The hawk, on the assumption (which was challenged in the previous section) that he has the last word in Hesiod's fable, has often been held to deliver the moral: "he is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors".[12] In the Aesopic fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.]), the hawk does deliver the moral in character text at the end of the narrative, which gets subsequently rephrased in narrator text as the epimythium.

The traditional fable assumed by Hesiod, on this view, would have had the moral: "don't fight with those who are stronger". It is sometimes supposed that in the traditional fable the nightingale had previously pitted herself against the hawk, and is being (justly) punished for so doing;[13] various Aesopic fables have such a moral.[14] However, there is nothing in Hesiod's narrative to suggest that the nightingale has previously foolishly provoked her misfortune, and the presentation in Hesiod's narrative of the nightingale is surely sympathetic, that of the hawk unsympathetic.[15] The nightingale of Hesiod's fable appears to be suffering her fate not because she has foolishly provoked one who is stronger, but just because she cannot defend herself against one who is stronger. Accordingly, other scholars have made the hawk into an advocate of the principle "might is right".[16] This is essentially the position ("justice is the will of the stronger") to which, two centuries later, the sophist Thrasymachus of Chalcedon would attempt to give philosophical respectability

12 West 1978, 298; Nelson 1997, 236; Adrados 1999, 154, cf. 374; Zafiropoulos 2001, 13–14; Zanker 2009, 11–12; Ercolani 2010, 205.

13 Theon *Prog.* 2 (74.18–21 Spengel). Daly 1961, 47–48; Dalfen 1994/1995, 170–171, 173; Ercolani 2010, 205–206; Steiner 2012, 9; Hunter 2014, 242 n. 38.

14 Aesop. 2 P. [= Hsr.; 5 Ch.]; 70 P. [= 71 Hsr.; 62 Ch.]; 104 P. [= 106 Hsr.; 122 Ch.]; 125 P. [= 128 Hsr.; 136 Ch.]. Dalfen 1994/1995, 169–170.

15 The hawk hardly lends itself for use as a positive example; at Pl. *Phdr.* 82a3–5, Socrates suggests those who in their lifetimes favoured injustices, tyrannies, and depredations (ἁρπαγάς; cf. μεμαρπώς, *Op.* 204), get reborn as wolves or hawks (ἱεράκων) or kites.

16 van Dijk 1997, 129: "it illustrates the might of right […] prevailing in the Iron Age". Cf. Kurke 2011, 403: "might-makes-right". Adrados 1999, 181: an example of a fable "in which the strong summarily imposes force, rejecting the pleas of the weak". Pucci 1977, 61: "Its general meaning is that it is foolish for the weak to bewail or protest against the violence of the powerful". Zafiropoulos 2001, 13–14.

in the first book of Plato's *Republic*.[17] A Sumerian 'parable' (or 'Wellerism'), featuring a pork-butcher and a pig, with a similar moral, is sometimes cited in support of this interpretation:[18]

> A pig which was being slaughtered by the pig-butcher screamed. "Along the road your ancestors and your uncles walked, you too are walking, <so why do you> scream?"[19]

As there is no point in the pig complaining to the butcher, so too there is none in the nightingale complaining to the hawk, if the hawk wishes to make the nightingale its dinner.

We have then, on the face of it, an odd mismatch between the moral which Hesiod requires in the context of his poem and the moral which the fable actually delivers.[20] One approach assumes that Hesiod has retold the traditional fable in essentially the form he has heard it, without adapting it to his own narrative requirements.[21] Hesiod, on this view, can only use this fable by gainsaying its moral.[22] The barons' morality (for which we may compare 38–39: βασιλῆας | δωροφάγους, οἳ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσσαι) appears to have put him in mind of the hawk of the traditional fable. However, whereas the fable employs the hawk as a positive example (on this interpretation), the mouthpiece of the assumed γνώμη of the fable, Hesiod needs him to function as a negative example, an illustration of how *not* to behave. Hesiod has been argued to deal with this mismatch between the moral required by the embedding narrative and the actual moral of the embedded traditional fable some sixty lines later on, when he adds:[23]

> τόνδε γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι νόμον διέταξε Κρονίων,
> ἰχθύσι μὲν καὶ θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖς πετεηνοῖς
> ἔσθειν ἀλλήλους, ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς·

17 The comparison with Thrasymachus is already made by schol. *Op.* 207–212 Pertusi.

18 Walcot 1966, 90; Bradford Welles 1967, 19; West 1997, 320; Woodard 2007, 108.

19 For the Sumerian fable, see Alster 1997, I 166. For Sumerian 'Wellerisms', see Alster 1997, I xv–xvi. The squealing pig, conscious of being destined for slaughter, is also found in Aesopic tradition: Aesop. 85 P. [= 87 Hsr.; 94 Ch.], cf. *Vit. Aesop.* 48 G.

20 Noted by Daly 1961, 46; Bradford Welles 1967, 17; West 1978, 49; Zanker 2009, 11.

21 Daly 1961, 50–51; Lasserre 1984, 82.

22 Zafiropoulos 2001, 14: "Hesiod… uses his fable as a negative illustration of his argument. He opposes the fable's message to what he sees as the right course of action in interpersonal relationships."

23 Führer 1967, 56, argues that the postponement of Hesiod's answer to the hawk's speech until *Op.* 276–280 is "naïve-artful" ("mit naiv-kunstvoller Verzögerung"). Cf. Clay 2003, 42: "Now at long last we get an explication of the fable with which Hesiod began his discourse on justice."

ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἔδωκε δίκην, ἣ πολλὸν ἀρίστη
γίνεται [...] 280
(Hes. *Op*. 276–280)

The son of Kronos assigned this law to men:
to fish and beasts and feathered birds,
to eat one another, since there is no justice among them;
but to men he has given justice, which is by far the best [...]
(Transl. B.C.)

In this passage Hesiod concedes that fish, beasts, and birds may eat each other with impunity. The mention of birds, in emphatic position, seems designed to recall the fable.[24] Hesiod has therefore often been argued here to make a crucial qualification to (or retraction of) the message of the fable: the law of "might is right" may hold good for the animal kingdom, but it does not in the world of humans.[25]

However, such shifting of position flies in the face of the rationale of the animal fable.[26] It is here beside the point to cite the normality of violence of one animal against another in the natural world.[27] It is irrelevant that the animal kingdom is occasionally, in non-fabular contexts, taken as being normative for human ethics.[28] In animal fable, it is universally the case that human ethics are made normative for animals. Animal fable takes speaking animals as its subjects so that they may articulate truths which are relevant to the human world. In Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle", Zeus is invoked by the fox as being explicitly concerned with the "violence and justice of beasts" ([ὦ Ζεῦ,] σοὶ δὲ θηρίων | ὕβρις καὶ δίκη μέλει, *fr*. 177.3–4 Swift). This is in direct contradiction to Hesiod's ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς, ("since there is no justice among them", *sc*. the fish, beasts, and birds, *Op*. 278).[29] It has therefore been suggested that Hesiod is self-consciously overthrowing the conventions of

24 Daly 1961, 49; Lonsdale 1989, 409.

25 Schol. *Op*. 213a Pertusi; West 1978, 204–205; Adrados 1999, 158, 267; van Dijk 1997, 130–131; Kurke 2011, 403–404.

26 Nelson 1997, 237: "*WD* 276–80, read as a correction of the fable, denies the basic presupposition of a fable, that a parallel can be drawn between human and animal behavior. To 'correct' a fable by pointing out that animals and men behave differently is like correcting it by pointing out that birds do not in fact speak in Greek hexameter verse. Animals of fable can, and often do, have δίκη, just as they can and do speak Greek". Zanker 2009, 12: "the usual purpose of *ainoi* is to build a comparison between human and animal kingdoms, not to do the reverse".

27 *Pace* Bradford Welles 1967, 18: "Greek literature, and Latin too, is full of references to hawks and eagles capturing and devouring their prey [...] I do not know of any instance where it is implied that the predators are wrong to eat their natural food [...]".

28 *Il*. 22.262 (cited by Lonsdale 1989, 409); Ar. *Nub*. 1427–1431; Hdt. 2.64.

29 West 1978, 227.

the fabular form,[30] and also that Archilochus, no less self-consciously, is reinstating them.[31] The latter suggestion is made somewhat problematic by the fact that Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle" is a close reception of the fable of "The Serpent and the Eagle" in *Etana*: specifically, Archilochus' fox's prayer to Zeus to uphold justice and punish the eagle (*fr*. 177.3–4 Swift) corresponds very closely to the serpent's prayer to Shamash to uphold justice and punish the eagle (*SB Etana* 2.59–71).[32] In animal fable, animals' participation in the same ethical and religious system as humans is a fundamental given of the genre, in both Mesopotamia and Greece, as well as elsewhere.

On this interpretation, Hesiod both repudiates the conventions of the genre of the animal fable and rejects the specific moral of the traditional fable that he decides to remind the barons of (202). He enlists the support of a traditional fable for his argument, but he is obliged to reject the traditional wisdom that it proclaims and replace it with one of his own. It is extraordinary too that it takes Hesiod more than sixty lines to get round to countering the damage done to his cause by citing an animal fable whose "might is right".[33] It is hard to see how this position could be maintained by any but those whose vision of Hesiod is that of a poet barely in control of his material, constantly struggling to accommodate traditional tales to his own narrative requirements.[34]

There is another objection to the notion that Hesiod's narrative relies on the idea that birds and beasts behave one way, but that humans (should) behave another. The hawk of Hesiod's fable develops the imagery of the lawless men of the iron race in the closing section of the myth of the five human races that has immediately preceded. Characteristic of these latter is that they take "justice in their own hands" (χειροδίκαι, 189; δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί, 192) and disregard the claims of morality with an assumption of impunity (οὐδὲ θεῶν ὄπιν εἰδότες, 187). This immoral philosophy and this violent imagery are both shared with the hawk of the fable, who

30 Heath 1985, 249: "Hesiod […] overthrows the convention of the form"; Kurke 2011, 403–404: "undermining or deconstructing the basic premise of fable"; Swift 2014, 72: "Hesiod's use of the *ainos* is itself a twist on the conventions of the animal fable"; Swift 2019, 336; Hunter 2014, 243: "If the *Works and Days* were a later text, then we would certainly see in Hesiod's use of the fable form a sophisticated variation away from a standard model".

31 Irwin 1998, 181–182; Swift 2014, 50, 72, 73.

32 Currie 2021, 129.

33 Cf. Dalfen 1994/1995, 167.

34 Cf. on Hesiod's myth of the races, Barron/Easterling 1985, 56–57: "we have an evidently traditional tale, somewhat crudely adapted"; Griffin 1986, 96: "[the story of the ages] is another eastern idea: Hesiod has rudely adapted it to Greek notions […] Hesiod, we feel, finds it hard to force his thoughts into shape, and he has to accept such inconcinnities".

clutches the nightingale in his "talons" (ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς, 204; ἀμφ' ὀνύχεσσι, 205), and insists on his entitlement to use her as he pleases, evidently without fear of consequences. In the figure of the nightingale, a "minstrel" (ἀοιδόν, 208), it is also possible to glimpse the singer-figure Hesiod, victim of Perseus' and the barons' rapacity (compare, of Perseus: ἀλλά τε πολλὰ | ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις ["but[35] snatching many things, you carried them off"], 37–38).[36] Thus not only does Hesiod employ a literary form, the animal fable, in which animals are conventionally endowed with human speech and human ethics, but also his own narrative develops multiple significant analogies between the animals of the fable and human characters precisely as moral agents. This makes it extremely difficult to think that Hesiod wished to insist that the animals of his fable (as opposed to the animals of real life, *Op.* 278) are answerable to different moral standards from humans.

3 A two-act fable, elliptically told?

An alternative approach to the mismatch between what the hawk says in the embedded fabular narrative and the moral message that is required for the embedding non-fabular narrative is available: this approach assumes that Hesiod has told the fable elliptically and that the traditional ending of the fable has been suppressed. Many animal fables comprise two acts, in the first of which one animal perpetrates an outrage against another and in the second gets his just deserts.[37] Other fables embedded in early Greek poetry are two-act fables, for instance, Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle": in the first act, the eagle, disregarding its friendship with the fox, eats the fox's cubs; in the second act, the fox eats the eagle's nestlings, after the eagle snatched up some smouldering meat from an altar, which set her nest alight. Two-act fables are attested in Mesopotamia (e.g. "The Serpent and the Eagle", in *Etana*) and in Egypt.[38]

What about "The Hawk and the Nightingale"? In the later collection of Greek fables attributed to Aesop, two fables are transmitted about a hawk and a nightingale. The first fable (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.]) is preserved in the 2nd-3rd century

35 For ἀλλά τε, see *Theog.* 797; Denniston 1959, 530. Inferior, in my view, is ἄλλα τε or ἄλλά τε, as usually printed.

36 Schol. *Op.* 202a Pertusi; Bradford Welles 1967, 18 and n. 41; Bona Quaglia 1973, 132; Pucci 1977, 62; West 1978, 208; Mordine 2006, 364 n. 4; Zanker 2009, 13; Steiner 2012, 8; Canevaro 2015, 55–56.

37 Adrados 1999, 35: "The *agon* may consist of two acts, sometimes with a reversal of the victory".

38 Cf. on the Egyptian fables, Oettinger 1992, 17.

CE *Collectio Augustana* [= *Codex Monacensis gr. 564*]. It is a single-act fable: the hawk eats the nightingale with impunity, and enunciates the moral of the fable.

> ΑΗΔΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΙΕΡΑΞ
> ἀηδὼν ἐπί τινος ὑψηλῆς δρυὸς καθημένη κατὰ τὸ σύνηθες ᾖδεν. ἱέραξ δὲ αὐτὴν θεασάμενος, ὡς ἠπόρει τροφῆς, ἐπιπτὰς συνέλαβεν. ἡ δὲ μέλλουσα ἀναιρεῖσθαι ἐδέετο αὐτοῦ μεθεῖναι, λέγουσα ὡς οὐχ ἱκανή ἐστιν ἱέρακος γαστέρα αὐτὴ πληρῶσαι, δεῖ δὲ αὐτόν, εἰ τροφῆς ἀπορεῖ, ἐπὶ τὰ μείζονα τῶν ὀρνέων τρέπεσθαι. καὶ ὃς ὑποτυχὼν εἶπεν· "ἀλλ' ἔγωγε ἀπόπληκτος ἂν εἴην, εἰ τὴν ἐν χερσὶν ἑτοίμην βορὰν παρεὶς τὰ μηδέπω φαινόμενα διώκοιμι."
> ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ ὅτι οὕτω καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀλόγιστοί εἰσιν, οἳ δι' ἐλπίδα μειζόνων τὰ ἐν χερσὶν ὄντα προίενται.
>
> (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.])

> The Nightingale and the Hawk.
> A nightingale sat on a tall oak tree and sang as was her wont. A hawk saw her and, since he was at a loss for food, flew at her and captured her. As she was about to be killed, she asked him to let her go, saying that she was not enough to fill the hawk's belly, and that he should, if he were at a loss for food, turn to the larger ones among the birds. And he said in reply, "But I would be witless if I passed up the food ready in my hands in pursuit of things not yet in sight."
> The fable shows that likewise among men those people are very foolish who in the hope of greater things let slip what is in their hands.
>
> (Transl. B.C.)

Op. 202–212 has sometimes been considered to be a version of this fable.[39] However, this fable, with its moral, "the bird in the hand […]", seems to shed little light on the interpretation of Hesiod's fable.[40]

The other fable (Ad. 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.]) is preserved in a medieval prose paraphrase of Phaedrus, the 11th-century 'Ademar codex' (Leiden *Cod. Voss. lat. 8° no. 15*).[41] It is a two-act fable, in the first of which the hawk eats (or at least, begins to eat) a nightingale chick, and in the second he is himself killed by a bird-catcher.

> LUSCINIA ET ACCIPITER[42]
> In nidum lusciniae cum sederet accipiter,[43] paruos in illo inuenit pullos. superuenit luscinia et rogabat illum parcere pullis. ait accipiter, "Faciam quod uis, si mihi b<e>ne cantaueris." et

39 Aly 1921, 26; Perry 1952, 323; Lasserre 1984, 61; Zafiropoulos 2001, 14, 58.

40 Daly 1961, 46: "This fable […] has little in common with that of Hesiod. The animal persons are the same, the one carries the other off, and they speak to each other. What they say, however, is different, and the point of the Aesopic fable is the same as that of the proverb 'a bird in the hand.' It does not seem to offer any help toward an understanding of Hesiod". Dalfen 1994/1995, 164.

41 See Zago 2020, XXVI, XXXVI. Cf. Henderson 1999, 312 n. 14.

42 The text presented here is that of Perry 1952, 612.

43 The text of Hervieux 1893/1899 here includes the clause *ut specularetur auritum* (sc. *leporem*) ("to look out for a hare"); the reading *auras* ("to survey the air") is preferable (Zander 1921, 26).

quamuis se† praecederet animo,[44] tamen metu pauebat; denique coacta et dolore plena cantauit. acceptor,[45] qui praedam captauerat, ait, "Non bene cantasti;" apprehenditque unum de pullis eius et deuorare coepit. ex diuerso uenit auceps et, calamo silenter leuato, acceptore<m>, contracto uisco, in terram deiecit.
Qui aliis insidiantur, timere debent ne capiantur.

(Ad. 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.])

The Nightingale and the Hawk.
When a hawk was alighting on a nightingale's nest, he found small chicks in it. The nightingale came and asked him to spare her chicks. The hawk said, "I will do what you wish, if first you sing for me well." Although she †surpassed herself in talent†, nevertheless she was stricken with fear. Finally, under duress and full of grief, she sang. The hawk, who already possessed his prey, said, "You didn't sing well", and seized one of her chicks and began to devour it. From the other direction came a bird catcher, and raising his rod silently, he gathered his birdlime and cast the hawk down to the ground.
Those who trick others should fear to be caught out themselves.

(Transl. B.C.)

This two-act fable, with its moral of retribution for unjust action, holds more interest and promise for the interpreter of Hesiod's fable. However, if we hope to reconstruct from this medieval version something like the traditional fable that may have been known to Hesiod and the barons (see above), then we would need to feel tolerably confident about retracing a process of translation, paraphrase, literary reception (involving an indeterminable amount of creative reworking), and written and oral transmission, that would take us back from the 11th-century CE Ademar to the 1st-century CE Phaedrus; from him via, probably, some Hellenistic fable collection to the 6th-century BCE Aesop or to some other non-Aesopic Archaic or Classical Greek source; and finally thence to a late-eighth- or early-seventh-century BCE fable that could be known to Hesiod and his public. Some of these steps may be plausible enough in themselves. Thus, it is, for instance, very conceivable that the fable 39 of the Ademar codex [= Aesop. 567 P.] uniquely preserves a genuine fable of Phaedrus.[46] Yet the route in its entirety involves a disconcerting number of uncertainties.

44 The *Romulus uulgaris* reads: *quamuis animus excederet* ("although her courage was leaving her"); Zander 1921, 25–26, reconstructs: *quamuis excideret metu* ("although she was faint with fear").
45 On the text of the paraphrase as transmitted, the form *accipiter* is used on the first occurrence, *acceptor* on the second; Phaedrus himself would have used the form *accipiter* (Zander 1921, 26).
46 For the Ademar codex in general as preserving fables of Phaedrus lost to the direct tradition, see e.g. Gatti 1979, 250 and n. 9. For Ademar 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.] in particular as Phaedran, cf. Zander 1921, 24–29; Henderson 1999, 329.

In particular, the question of how Phaedrus' fables may (or may not) relate to putative Greek 'originals' is highly unclear.[47]

4 Euripides' *Hecuba*

Help may come from an unexpected quarter. We have an arguable reflection of a fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" — or at least, of a fable in which a nightingale was obliged to sing for its own and/or for its chick's life — in a well-known (but in this context hitherto ignored) text of the 5th century BCE: Euripides' *Hecuba*:

> {Εκ.} ὦ θύγατερ, οὐμοὶ μὲν λόγοι πρὸς αἰθέρα
> φροῦδοι μάτην ῥιφθέντες ἀμφὶ σοῦ φόνου·
> σὺ δ', εἴ τι μείζω δύναμιν ἢ μήτηρ ἔχεις,
> σπούδαζε πάσας ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα
> φθογγὰς ἰεῖσα, μὴ στερηθῆναι βίου.
> (Eur. *Hec*. 334–338)
>
> [Hekabe:] Daughter, my own speeches concerning the killing of you vanish into thin air, cast fruitlessly towards the sky; do you, if you have by any chance greater power than your mother, strive, sending forth all your utterances, like the mouth of the nightingale, not to be deprived of your life.
>
> (Transl. B.C.)

We have here again the problem of ascertaining the implications of the use of ἀηδόνος without an article: it seems clear that it does not mean "*a* nightingale", nor "*the* nightingale" in a generic sense (i.e. collective singular), but rather "*the* nightingale", in a particularizing sense. That is, reference is made to a particular nightingale known from a traditional story, an animal fable, or, failing that, from a traditional proverb (such as at Archil. *fr*. 196a.41: ὥσπερ ἡ κ[ύων). It is clear also that the phrase ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα does not introduce a simple natural world comparison, as e.g. ὥστ' ὄρνιν ("like a bird", *Hec*. 178), but rather makes an allusion to a nightingale who was known from some traditional story in which she sung (implied by στόμα, "mouth"). Insofar as commentators have sought to identify any mythological allusion here, they have looked to the myths of Prokne or of her doublet, Aëdon ("Nightingale", personified).[48] These, however, provide very obscure analogues to the situation of Euripides' play. In these myths, the nightingale (the

47 On the question of Phaedrus' relationship with his Aesopic / Greek sources, see Henderson 1999, 317–321; Holzberg 2002, 44–45; Gärtner 2015, 41–42.

48 E.g. Battezzato 2018, 120.

metamorphosed Prokne or Aëdon) sings in grief for the child whom she has herself killed.[49] The difference between such a situation and that of Hekabe and Polyxena is glaring. On the one hand, Hekabe is not Polyxena's killer, and it would make no sense for her to court a comparison between herself and the filicides Prokne or Aëdon. An equivalence of Polyxena with Prokne or Aëdon can only be made sense of if we jettison any detailed correspondence and suppose that the nightingale-Prokne is invoked simply as being proverbial for mourning. This involves a particular understanding of the scope of the comparison that is expressed by ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα: what Polyxena and the nightingale have in common will be confined to just the notion contained in the participial phrase πάσας [...] φθογγὰς ἰεῖσα, so that Polyxena is urged to pull out all the stops in her pleading, just as the nightingale Prokne / Aëdon pulled out all the stops in her grieving.[50] All the same, the asymmetry between the two situations remains stronger than any symmetry, since Polyxena is crucially being urged, not to grieve, but to plead for her own life (337–338); the only point they have in common is the trivial-seeming one of each of them performing at full throttle, whether a lament or a plea. Hekabe, as a grieving mother, would have something more substantial in common with Prokne / Aëdon. Yet she is not (in *this* passage; contrast later, at 434) interested in mourning the still-living Polyxena, but in making pleas to save her life, while acknowledging these to be futile (334–335). The situation of Hekabe and Polyxena, then, is overwhelmingly asymmetrical with that of Prokne and Itys.

It is, however, strikingly symmetrical with the first of the first act of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" fable Ad. 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.], where the nightingale-mother sings desperately and in vain to prevent the killing of her chick. The scope of the comparison expressed by ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα can now be more plausibly understood. The extent of comparison between Polyxena and the nightingale, rather than being confined to the participial clause, extends also to the infinitival phrase: σπούδαζε πάσας [...] | φθογγὰς ἰεῖσα **μὴ στερηθῆναι βίου**. Thus, Polyxena will be being urged to resemble the nightingale who pulled out all the stops in her singing in order *not to be deprived of her life*. This motif takes us away from the myths of Prokne or Aëdon, but takes us close, very close, to the nightingale of our fable, whether in either its Hesiodic or its putatively Phaedrian variant.

The correspondence of the situation of Hekabe and Polyxena and that of the nightingale and her chicks in fable Ad. 39 is complex. Hekabe first alludes to a

49 Gantz 1993, I 239–241; Hansen 2002, 303.

50 πάσας [...] φθογγάς (Eur. *Hec*. 337–338) has frequently been compared with πολυχέα φωνήν (*Od*. 19.521; of the nightingale's song): Battezzato 2018, 120; Gregory 1999, 86; Tierney 1946, 65; cf. Mossman 1995, 117 and n. 66.

situation in which the mother fails to save her progeny with her singing (334–335), as in the putatively Phaedrian fable Ad. 39. Secondly, she introduces the idea, foreign to Ad. 39, that the imperilled offspring should try to save *herself* with her own pleading/singing (336–338), which is closer to the situation of Hesiod's fable. We will consider presently (see below) what version of a "Hawk and Nightingale" fable Euripides may presuppose and also what innovation he might be capable of introducing into the fabular scenario.

We must consider how plausible it is that Euripides alludes to an animal fable. The use of a fable would be unparalleled in extant Euripides. However, it would not be exceptional for other 5th-century BCE tragedy. Tragic use of a fable is most explicitly signalled in Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (*fr*. 139 *TGF*), where the fable known as "The Eagle and the Arrow" (Aesop. 276 P. [= 273 Hsr.; 7 Ch.]) is summarized and its fabular status explicitly recognized: μύθων τῶν Λιβυστικῶν.[51] In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the altercation between Menelaos and Teukros incorporates a fable (1142–1146) that is unattested elsewhere, but which in modern discussions rejoices in the title "The Braggart".[52] Sophocles also employed the fable of "The Ass and the Snake" in the satyr play *Dumb Ones* (*fr*. 362 *TGF*).[53] In the *Agamemnon*, lines 717–736, Aeschylus makes use of the fable of "The Man and the Lion Cub",[54] whose imagery and themes are of fundamental importance for the *Oresteia* trilogy as a whole.[55] The usage of a fable by Euripides thus does not seem unthinkable.

Moreover, a reference to the fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" would make good sense thematically in the wider context of Euripides' play. *Hecuba* is a play that holds up to scrutiny from various angles the principle that "might is right", or, to put it more Hesiodically, that of taking "justice into one's own hands" (δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί, *Op*. 192). The principle is evident in both in the Greeks' killing of Polyxena and in Polymestor's killing of Polydoros, both abhorrent acts of violence perpetrated against a defenceless victim in the assumption of complete impunity on the

51 Adrados 2003, 339–341; van Dijk 1997, 169–171. Cf. Rutherford 2012, 350.

52 I do not follow Holzberg 2002, 12, in listing Soph. *Aj*. 1150–1158 as an example of a tragic allusion to an independent pre-existing fable ("The Malicious Gloater", Holzberg), since it seems to be just an *ad hoc* parody by Teukros of Menelaos' immediately preceding fable.

53 Adrados 2003, 522.

54 For this as a fable, see Adrados 2003, 827, cf. 287; van Dijk 1997, 171–617. Cf. Pl. *Grg*. 483e5–6, with Dodds 1959, 268. On Aesch. *Ag*. 717 ἔθρεψεν, see Raeburn/Thomas 2011, 142: "Greek fables characteristically begin with a verb". On Aesch. *Ag*. 719 ἀνήρ, see Fraenkel 1950, II 339: "the unqualified ἀνήρ, with which a character of the story is introduced, is a typical feature of the terse style of the old αἶνος", 342; cf. van Dijk 1997, 173. On Aesch. *Ag*. 739, see Holzberg 2002, 20.

55 See esp. Knox 1952.

part of the vastly stronger aggressor. Especially noteworthy are Odysseus' words to Hekabe:

> οἶσθ' οὖν ὃ δρᾶσον· μήτ' ἀποσπαθῆις βίαι
> μήτ' ἐς χερῶν ἅμιλλαν ἐξέλθηις ἐμοί,
> γίγνωσκε δ' ἀλκὴν καὶ παρουσίαν κακῶν
> τῶν σῶν· σοφόν τοι κἀν κακοῖς ἃ δεῖ φρονεῖν.
> (Eur. *Hec*. 225–228)

> You know what you have to do; don't get dragged away by force,
> and don't enter into a contest of physical strength with me,
> but acknowledge <*sc*. your opponent's> might and the presence of misfortunes
> on your side; it's a mark of wisdom even among misfortunes to have the attitude that is necessary.
> (Transl. B.C.)

This reads like a paraphrase of the words of Hesiod's hawk to the nightingale: note ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων ("one who is far stronger has you in his grasp", *Op.* 207); ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλῃ πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν ("he is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors", *Op.* 210). Moreover, the subsequent remark of the Trojan women τολμᾶι θ' ἃ μὴ χρή, τῆι βίαι νικώμενον ("[a slave] endures what he should not, being mastered by force", *Hec*. 333) describes the situation of Hesiod's nightingale as aptly as they do that of Hekabe in Euripides' play.

The Thracian king Polymestor, who murders Polydoros for his gold and supposes himself secure from reprisals given the assumed ignorance and impotence of his victims, also appears in a decidedly hawkish light. He blatantly contravenes the Hesiodic maxim, χρήματα δ' οὐχ ἁρπακτά ("money is not for snatching", *Op.* 320). That adage appears in a passage in *Works and Days* that features thematic echoes of the rapacity of the hawk in the fable (φέρων ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς, 204; a phrase which in turn echoes ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις, 38, of Perses). Finally, Euripides' tragedy at its end resembles a two-act fable in a particularly gruesome and unsettling form: a violent justice is unexpectedly visited on the perpetrator by the powerless-seeming mother, who ultimately herself also takes justice-cum-retribution very literally "into her own hands" (*Hec*. 1252–1253; cf. δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί, *Op.* 192).

If Euripides is indeed alluding to a fable in which a nightingale sang for the preservation of her own or of her chicks' life (or in which a chick also sang for her own life), then Euripides hardly derived this detail from Hesiod, in whose truncated and elliptical narrative the motif of the nightingale singing to save her life, let alone that of her chicks, is not clearly in evidence. Therefore, one inference is that something resembling the first act of our fable Ad. 39 was already current and familiar in the later 5th century BCE (at which time it could already have been known as a

fable of "Aesop").[56] Euripides, like Hesiod, seems to presuppose his audience's familiarity with it as a traditional fable. Thus, while we started by considering the interactions between one embedded fable and its embedding poetic context (in Hesiod's *Works and Days*), we have ended up by considering another (in Euripides' *Hecuba*).

5 A quandary regarding the identification of source-texts and target-texts

The aim of the preceding was to try to recover the outlines of a traditional fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" as this might have been known to Hesiod and his public in the 7th century BCE. The undertaking is severely problematized by the uncertainty whether the later-attested fables of the Aesopic corpus can be taken as indirect sources of Hesiod or whether conversely Hesiod is to considered the source for these.[57] A number of "Aesopic" fables are apparently inspired by Hesiod (as also by other poets).[58] However, there is also the possibility that fables found in the late collection(s) ascribed to "Aesop" may reflect much older traditions. This possibility is suggested by "The Eagle and Fox", where the "Aesopic" version is clearly very similar to the version told by Archilochus, yet exhibits a notable detail that is found also in the ancient Mesopotamian fable which it evidently did not derive from Archilochus.[59] It is conceivable that some very early (pre-Hesiodic) oral fabular traditions found their way into the later "Aesopic" corpus.[60]

56 For knowledge of Aesop in the 5th century BCE, see Ar. *Av.* 471; Ar. *Pax* 129; Hdt. 2.134.3; Pl. *Phd.* 60d1, 61b2–7.

57 Cf. Aly 1921, 26 and n. 2; Lefkowitz 2014, 8: "no doubt influenced by Hesiod"; see further van Dijk 1997, 128 n. 40, 132: "One might conjecture that Hesiod presupposes acquaintance of his audience with some (lost) version of the corresponding Aesopic fable [*sc.* Aesop. 4 P.] […] However, it seems more probable to assume that, conversely, the Aesopic fable 'normalizes' Hesiod's fable". Hunter 2014, 246: "the relationship between Hesiod and the fable tradition is much less clear and clean. On any view of the 'origin' of fables in Greek tradition, Hesiod has both exploited a popular mode of moralizing, but also fed back into that tradition".

58 Adrados 1999, 267: "Some of these myths of Hesiod have ended up definitively in the collections of fables, such as that of the jar of Pandora, that of the two roads, that of Prometheus".

59 Currie 2021, 131 and n. 30.

60 Lefkowitz 2014, 1–2: "despite the exclusively textual nature of our evidence for the ancient fable, it is generally assumed that written fables bear traces of an oral tradition that stretches back to the very dawn of history. Before the occurrence of the earliest Greek animal fables in the poems of Hesiod (*Works and Days* 202–12) and Archilochus (frs. 172–81 West), and long before the earliest

We might summarize the four different versions of a fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" as follows (for the time being, no inferences are being drawn about their relative chronology):

a. (Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.]) The nightingale fails to convince the hawk by rational argument not to eat her. However, her argument, "I would not fill your belly" is countered by his: "The bird in the hand (talons) […]".
b. (Ad. 39 [= Aesop. 567 P.]) The nightingale fails to persuade the hawk by the beauty of her singing not to eat her chicks. His retort is: "You did not sing beautifully enough".
c. (Hes. *Op.* 202–212) The nightingale fails to move the hawk to pity so as not to use her however he wishes. His retort: "It is futile to strive against those who are stronger".
d. (Eur. *Hec.*) In Euripides' play, the daughter, Polyxena, is urged to do all she can to move the Greeks to pity so as not to kill her ("like the nightingale"); she will do so in vain. The mother, Hekabe, has already tried in vain to move the Greeks to pity so as not to kill her daughter; she is subsequently told by Odysseus, "it is futile to strive against those who are stronger". Behind this may glimmer a fable in which the nightingale failed to persuade (by whatever rational argument, emotive appeal, or beautiful singing) the hawk not to eat her chick(s), and was told by him that it is futile to strive against those who are stronger.

It is questionable whether it is viable (both from a methodological and a practical point of view) to try to construct here an "original" scheme. The enterprise is somewhat comparable to trying to draw a "line of best fit" but with only a tiny number of points. Nor is it clear that all points should carry the same weight in the reconstruction; and it is entirely unclear how they should be differentially weighted. Furthermore, it involves an assumption that these four versions are all inflections of the same basic uniform (rather than multiform) narrative, which has been variously received in different literary contexts; instead, it is entirely possible that they are all mutually independent realizations of a 'hawk versus nightingale' scenario.

On the other hand, *Op.* 202–212 evidently presupposes the existence of a traditional fable of "The Hawk and Nightingale" that is familiar to its public (see above). And so too, apparently, does *Hecuba* 337–338. It thus seems reasonable to attempt what can be done to reconstruct the version that each of these presupposes. We

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reference to the legendary fabulist Aesop in the 5th century BC (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134), the genre had already enjoyed a long history in the Near East, from where, most scholars agree, the fable migrated to Greece during the orientalizing revolution' of the archaic period". Cf. Duchemin 1995, 72–73; Holzberg 2002, 15.

have four putative 'witnesses' to our presumptive original, traditional version(s); yet we must also reckon with the near certainty that each one has taken liberties and worked innovations on any presumptively inherited story. The best we can do is to explore hypothetical possibilities.

We might, for instance, posit an 'original scheme' in which the nightingale pleaded with the hawk on behalf of her chicks, rather than herself. The motif of one animal (bird) eating the young of another is also attested in Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and Eagle". Hesiod would then have innovated by eliding this detail. It is possible that Hesiod airbrushed out the chicks that we see in the version of Ad. 39 in order to give a starker focus on the hawk and nightingale: a single aggressor and a single victim. In addition, offspring do not play a role in Hesiod's depiction of his own maltreatment at the hands of Perses and the barons; imperilled offspring would also be a distracting irrelevance for the parallel Hesiod is clearly interested in creating between the nightingale and Dike in 220–221 (unjust men do violence to Justice / Dike, and she laments the violence done to her). In this eventuality, the embedding poetic narrative would have exerted its influence on the embedded fable. This kind of scenario, of Hesiod adapting the fabular paradigm to the paraenetic context of his poem, would be comparable with what we find Homeric epic, where there is frequently innovation and invention in the narration of mythological paradigms (by secondary narrators) in the interests of bringing these into greater accord with the narrative situation in which characters find themselves. (The *locus classicus* is Achilleus, speaking to Priam, inventing the detail that Niobe refused to eat after losing her twelve children.) Hesiod, on this scenario, only includes the snapshot of the fabular narrative that is relevant to him, viz. the hawk's mindset: that, as the stronger, he can do what he likes to the weaker with impunity. Inclusion of the detail of the hawk actually eating the nightingale or her chicks (if it had featured in the presumptively traditional fable) would not only reduce comparability with the image of Dike at 220–221, it would also involve an awkward acknowledgement that the victims of injustice may themselves suffer unredressable harm before their aggressors are punished: a bigger concession to reality than it would suit the narrator of *Works and Days* to make. Euripides features the motif of the mother pleading in vain for the life of her daughter (*Hec*. 334–335): on this scenario, we would have intensified the pathos of the situation by having the daughter Polyxena (corresponding to the nightingale's chick) also *plead for herself*, following the failure of the mother's plea (cf. εἴ τι μείζω δύναμιν ἢ μήτηρ ἔχεις ["if you have by any chance greater power than your mother"], *Hec*. 336).

Alternatively, we could posit an 'original scheme' in which no chick is featured and the captured nightingale pleaded with the hawk purely on her behalf. This motif would be quite faithfully reflected in Hesiod's version and in Euripides', though

in the latter case this involves taking Polyxena's pleas, rather than Hekabe's, to correspond to those of the nightingale, and hence taking Polyxena to equate to the nightingale, not the chick (her status as Hekabe's daughter then being irrelevant to the nightingale-comparison).

In this minefield of uncertainties, it would be tempting to make the following tentative inferences about a putatively original version. First, that the hawk threatened the nightingale's chick, and that the nightingale pleaded with the hawk to save it (Ad. 39; indirectly reflected in Euripides; perhaps elided by Hesiod). Second, that the nightingale's skill as a singer failed to avert the threat (Ad. 39; καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν, Hes. *Op.* 208; probably implied by Euripides). Third, that the hawk is an advocate of the principle "might is right" (cf. Ad. 39); Hesiod; indirectly reflected in Euripides). Fourth, that the hawk's aggression gets subsequently punished, and his flawed philosophy of "might is right" is overwritten with the principle "injustice will be punished in the end" (cf. Ad. 39; reflected, more or less indirectly, in each of Hesiod and Euripides).

On such a scenario, Aesop. 4 P. [= Hsr.; 8 Ch.] would be shown to be an outlier in every respect. It exhibits various "blind motifs": the nightingale's status as a songbird is irrelevant to the action and to its moral, "the bird in the hand" (any small bird would have done equally well, a renowned songbird is not required). The initial mention of nightingale's singing (κατὰ τὸ σύνηθες ᾖδεν ["she was singing, as was her wont"]) appears as another blind motif. Moreover, the hawk, counterintuitively, is not a paragon of immoral violence, but of rational good sense; he is not an advocate of the principle "might is right", but of sound home economics ("the bird in the hand"). He not only goes unpunished, but his act is tacitly approved, his philosophy commended. If this is a version of the same fable as that apparently presupposed by the other three putative "witnesses", then it should presumably be seen as a bold and provocative rewriting. Alternatively, it could be viewed as a creative (deliberately reductive) reception of Hesiod's fable, read simplistically as a one-act fable, in which the hawk delivers the moral.

6 The question of Hesiodic adaptation — and Hesiodic sophistication

On the interpretation of the Hesiodic fable advocated here, the hawk does not speak the moral, and Hesiod's narration involves an ellipse of the second act of the putatively traditional fable, in which the hawk got his come-uppance, and the moral was

stated ("justice comes in the end to the unjust", or similar).[61] Not all critics are happy to ascribe to Hesiod such an ellipse. Thus, West writes: "Hesiod seems not to have known of such an ending [*sc*. as found in Ad. 39], or he would certainly have used it".[62] More recently, but in a similar vein, Ercolani writes: "we are thus required to reject all hypotheses advanced about the 'lack of a moral' or about an 'implicit moral' opposed to the tale".[63]

Yet grounds for thinking that Hesiod does presuppose some kind of second act in which the hawk got its just deserts are to be found in the section of generalized *gnomai* which immediately follows the fable:[64]

> [...] δίκη δ' ὑπὲρ ὕβριος ἴσχει
> ἐς τέλος ἐξελθοῦσα· παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω.
> αὐτίκα γὰρ τρέχει Ὅρκος ἅμα σκολιῇσι δίκῃσιν·
> τῆς δὲ Δίκης ῥόθος ἑλκομένης ᾗ κ' ἄνδρες ἄγωσι 220
> δωροφάγοι, σκολιῇς δὲ δίκῃς κρίνωσι θέμιστας·
> ἣ δ' ἕπεται κλαίουσα πόλιν καὶ ἤθεα λαῶν,
> ἠέρα ἐσσαμένη, κακὸν ἀνθρώποισι φέρουσα,
> οἵ τέ μιν ἐξελάσωσι καὶ οὐκ ἰθεῖαν ἔνειμαν.
> (Hes. *Op*. 217–224)

> [...] in the end justice always prevails over violence.
> Only a fool learns by suffering. Oath runs off as soon as judgements become crooked
> and there is the din of Justice being dragged wherever men lead her,
> men who devour bribes and who judge cases with crooked judgements.
> She [Justice] follows behind, bewailing the city and the people's morals,
> cloaked in mist, bearing woe to men who have driven her out and not dealt her <*sc*. Justice>. straight.
>
> (Transl. B.C.)

There are striking similarities in theme and diction between this passage and the fable which precedes it. The hawk's words to the nightingale: ᾗ σ' ἂν ἐγώ περ ἄγω ("you will go wherever I lead you", 208) are echoed in the description of Δίκη (Justice, personified) dragged ᾗ κ' ἄνδρες ἄγωσι ("wherever men lead her", 220).[65] The nightingale was described as "lamenting piteously" and "screeching"; this is echoed in the subsequent passage by the ῥόθος ("din") that is made by Justice as she is

61 Cf. Bona Quaglia 1973, 132–133.

62 West 1978, 205.

63 Ercolani 2010, 205: "si impone pertanto di rigettare tutte le ipotesi avanzate sulla 'mancanza di una morale' o su una 'morale implicita' opposta al racconto".

64 Cf. Bonaffé 1983, 263; Pucci 1977, 65.

65 Bonaffé 1983, 263.

dragged, and in Justice's κλαίουσα ("bewailing") the city and its inhabitants' morals.[66] The hawk tells the nightingale δεῖπνον [...] ποιήσομαι ("I will make a *meal* of you, if I want to", 209); similarly, the men who abuse Justice are called δωροφάγοι ("bribe-*devouring*", 221). The verbal and conceptual echoes show that the fable segues and meshes with the following passage. The moral of the fable is contained not in the narrative of the fable, but rather in the following section, even though this is marked as being narratologically distinct from it. Despite their narratological distinctness, therefore, the fable and the immediately following narrative passage should be recognized as comprising a single discursive entity; the boundary between embedded fable and embedding narrative is permeable to a high degree.[67]

The suppressed two-act structure of the embedded fable is confirmed by the explicit presence of a two-act structure in the embedding narrative. The image of Justice, manhandled by wicked men in 217–224, is developed further in 258–262, where it is said of Justice (personified) that "whenever someone harms her by abusing her crookedly, straightaway she takes her seat by father Zeus, son of Kronos, and speaks of the mind of unjust men, so that the people may pay for the recklessness of their kings [...]". Here, a two-act structure is clear: in the first act, crooked men ride rough-shod over Justice; in the second, Justice ensures that punishment is meted out to crooked men.

Here we must confront the question why an author should ever wish to suppress the moral that is being relied on (compare West, cited above). One easy answer is that well-known fables, like proverbs, simply invite truncation.[68] Thus, Hamlet can say: "'While the grass grows' — the proverb is something musty" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.ii.334–335). (The conclusion of the proverb was: "[...] the steed starves".) In Anthony Trollope's novel *Barchester Towers* (Chapter 1), the narrator states simply: "There is a proverb with reference to the killing of cats [...]". (The proverb in full ran: "There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream".) No very sophisticated interpretative effects need be in play here, though the suppression of the conclusion to the proverb clearly serves to establish a complicity between author and reader / audience.

66 Bonaffé 1983, 263. Cf. Hamilton 1989, 63.

67 Cf. in general, Gagné 2010, 4: "The *Works and Days*, especially the Myth of Races, have often been read as a series of self-contained, discrete passages entirely autonomous from each other"; 5: "That reading strategy of episodic dislocation reproduces the logic of circumscribed reception we have just followed. I believe it misses the core importance of the poetic architecture which structures the *Works and Days*, the embedded resonance of passage commenting on passage as the verses are sung". Cf. Friedländer 1966, 223–224 (= 1913, 558–559).

68 Including the earliest attested proverbs in Sumerian: Alster 1997, I xv; 2007, 5–6.

Sometimes, however, more complex effects are achieved. This is the case in the 9 employed by Phoinix in his speech in the Iliadic Embassy. (Phoinix' paraenetic speech to Achilleus is, incidentally, already suggestively analogous to the narrative situation presented by Hesiod's paraenetic address to Perseus in *Works and Days*.)[69] Phoinix does not narrate the death of Meleagros, but the paradigm has an obvious frisson for the audience member who recalls it (whether the secondary narrator and secondary narratee, Phoinix and Achilleus respectively, are themselves conscious of this ellipse is another question).[70] Bacchylides does similar, though even more complex, things with the same Meleagros paradigm in his fifth ode. This time, Meleagros himself, as a shade in the underworld, narrates his own untimely death to Herakles; yet eerie resemblances between Meleagros' embedded story of his own death and the known mythological tradition of Herakles' death intimate the latter's death, even though this is not narrated in the ode.[71] Moreover, although neither the death nor the subsequent immortalization of Herakles are narrated, it is possible that both the death and the subsequent immortalization are meant to be understood as being paradigmatic for the addressee of the ode, Hieron (as Meleagros' death was paradigmatic for Herakles').[72] Such examples show that the most significant implications of a paradigm may perfectly well be left unsaid, and it is not an unreasonable excess of interpretative charity that extends to Hesiod the possibility of the same with his embedded fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale".

7 Conclusion

It was stated at the outset of this paper that Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" offered an excellent opportunity to investigate the kind of interactions that may be found between an embedded fable and its embedding narrative. In the course of our discussion, we also considered a second arguable embedding of the same fable, in Euripides' *Hecuba*. This conclusion will reflect briefly on both.

The first and obvious thing to say is that the fable, when embedded in each of these particular poetic texts, does not remain inert: there is vigorous and reciprocal interaction between the embedded fable and the embedding text. The embedding text variously acts on the fable, inflicting on it *truncation* in the form of ellipse of certain details (in both Hesiod and Euripides, the beginning and the end of the

69 Walcot 1966, 97.
70 See Alden 2000, 179–290.
71 Cairns 2010, 89; Currie 2016, 129.
72 Cairns 2010, 91–92.

narrative; in Hesiod, arguably, the presence of a nightingale chick); *spotlighting* of other details (in Hesiod, the nightingale is gripped in the hawk's talons); and the likely *innovation* of other details again (in Euripides, the nightingale chick is to plead on her own account, after the failure of her mother's efforts). In turn, the fable affects the embedding text, drawing the language, imagery, and themes of the latter into the gravitational pull of its own semantic field (in Hesiod, 'bribe-*devouring*' men dragging a vociferously lamenting Justice in the passage immediately following the fable, and men taking justice 'into their own hands', in the passage immediately preceding it; in Euripides, a 'might is right' ideology problematically suffusing the whole play). The embedded fable, in other words, though of modest compass itself in relation to the whole work, is not quickly done with, its message rapidly dispensed once and for all; rather, it evolves and continues to play out a ramifying significance, developing a shifting meaning as the embedding text unfolds.

The other obvious point to be made is that the different embedding poetic texts handle the fable differently, in ways that can fairly be related to their respective generic concerns. We may say that, embedded in *Works and Days* and in *Hecuba*, the same fable undergoes specifically 'didactic' or 'instructional' transformation and 'tragic' transformation respectively. One convenient way of illustrating this is by focussing on the differential treatment of knowledge in both texts.

Knowledge is fundamental to Hesiod's poem of instruction: wisdom is imparted throughout the poem by a knowledgeable praeceptor (Hesiod) to a less knowledgeable or ignorant praeceptee: (μέγα) νήπιε Πέρση (286, 397, 633); νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασιν…, "fools; nor do they know…" (40); παῦροι δ' αὖτε ἴσασι…, "few know…" (814); παῦροι δὲ ἴσασι…, "few know…" (824); τάων εὐδαίμων τε καὶ ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδε πάντα | εἰδὼς κτλ., "fortunate and blessed is he who, knowledgeable of all things about these [days]…" (826–827). It is, naturally, taken for granted that the narrator (Hesiod) himself knows the wisdom message of the fable. The barons are also said to 'know it themselves' (202) — thought it seems they could benefit from a "refresher course". The external audience are evidently also expected to know it. Within the fabular narrative, the hawk assumes superior knowledge vis-à-vis the nightingale: '"He is witless (ἄφρων) who tries to struggle against his superiors"' (210). The hawk would be in control of wisdom, dispensing *a* moral — not, as we know, *the* moral. The embedding text insists: 'justice prevails in the end over violence' (217–218) — *that*, not 'justice is the interest of the stronger' (aka 'might is right'), is the true moral of the embedding poem and, we may assume, was approximately the moral of the traditional fable known to Hesiod and his audience. The embedding text continues: 'only a fool (νήπιος) learns (ἔγνω) through suffering' (218). The hawk of the fable, it turns out, is just such a fool: one who must learn his lesson through suffering. There is much explicit and direct instruction in *Works and Days*, but there is also much

significant ethical and poetical communication by implication and indirection; the embedded fable, in its interaction with the embedding narrative, is a salient example of this.

Knowledge is also fundamental, though in a different way, to tragedy. Recognition (ἀναγνώρισις), for Aristotle a key component of tragedy, involves 'a change from ignorance (ἄγνοια) to knowledge (γνῶσις)' (*Poetics* 1452a29–31). 'Tragic irony' is the situation, also characteristic of tragedy, where different levels of knowledge are possessed by different characters relative to one another or by characters relative to the audience.[73] In the fable's first activation in the play by Hekabe, she intends the identification of the animal characters of the fable with the characters of the play in a controlled and pellucid way: the nightingale chick is Polyxena, her mother is Hekabe, the hawk represents the Greeks. The roles are subsequently taken up, with greater or lesser awareness, by the characters of the play. Odysseus unwittingly (we may assume) channels the unattractive hawk of the fable when he speaks lines 225–228; like Hesiod's hawk, he freely dispenses wisdom: 'it's a mark of wisdom (σοφόν τοι) even among misfortunes to have the attitude that is necessary', viz. submitting to the interest of the stronger party. Again, this should not be taken to be the playwright's, or the audience's, 'wisdom'. A twist comes when Hekabe takes 'justice' (read: vengeance) into her own hands at the end: is Hekabe by the end more a passive victim of unjust male violence or more an active female perpetrator of a counter-violence that is shocking and distasteful in its own right? Is she more aligned with the nightingale or with the hawk of the fable? Neither she nor the other characters have the leisure to pose the question in these terms, but we do, and should. In *Hecuba*, the embedded fable is at the centre of both tragic irony and recognition (the latter chiefly Polymnestor's), following a situational reversal (περιπέτεια). Moral complexity, ambiguity, and, perhaps, insecurity all come with a decided lability in the application of the fable. Odysseus taught the 'wisdom' of 'might is right'; Hekabe learnt that wisdom and enacted it in turn on Polymnestor. This kind of uncomfortable uncertainty of tragic right and wrong contrasts with the comfortable certainty of Hesiodic instructional morality. Although in the tragedy the fable is first introduced knowingly by a character, none of characters retain control over its polyvalence, and character knowledge and sensibilities do not keep step with audience knowledge and sensibilities.

73 Rutherford 2012, 324–325.

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Keating P. J. McKeon

Taming the Lion/Feeding the Beast: Homeric Fables and the Ethics of Epic

Abstract: This chapter argues that Apollo's comparison of Achilles to a lion seeking a feast at *Il.* 24.39–45 constitutes a compressed fable narrative, which functions as an embedded ethical program within the epic. Previous scholarship has typically categorized these lines alongside other similes involving lions in the *Iliad*, a classification informed by a conception of generic hierarchy that relegates the beast fable to an inferior status relative to epic and is accordingly disposed to read animal content in Homer as the domain of simile. This chapter looks beyond such limitations both to resolve the paradoxical relationship of beast and feast and to clarify the moral encoding of Apollo's discourse, demonstrating a condensed but complex engagement with the didactic fable (αἶνος). Consequently, I locate not only an intergeneric dialogue with unique implications for the immediate narrative, but also a forceful glance back to the grisly feast (and notorious crux) of the proem

1 Introduction

As the *Iliad*'s final book begins, Olympus is riven by supersized tensions. A poem's worth of battlefield manipulations has led the gods at last to a decisive confrontation over one of the narrative's central ethical quandaries: just how much is owed our enemies?

It is the Greek hero Achilles who has brought these matters to a head. Little satisfied by simply killing his chief Trojan adversary, Hector, the son of Peleus revels in corpse mutilation of the most violent type: lashing Hector's body to his chariot, Achilles drags it repeatedly around Patroclus' tomb, leaving the corpse to lie mangled on the ground at day's end. We as the poem's audience are presented with a scene pitiful and stomach-churning in equal measure — a reaction shared by the god Apollo. Addressing the other Olympians, he expresses his disgust at Achilles' behavior: the hero, he says, is like a savage lion seeking a feast (δαίς). This lion's desired repast, in other words, is no accustomed prey but the typical prerogative of human beings as a meal

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of ritual importance; it is enough to bring us up short if imagined in a lion's mouth. It suggests an explosion of norms verging on the anarchic, a world in which bloodthirsty lions dine like humankind. In the disruption of Apollo's peculiar construction, however, it is generic hierarchies themselves that may be torn asunder.

In this chapter, I will argue that what has typically been classed as merely another lion-centered simile at *Il.* 24.39–45 may be read more profitably as a compressed fable narrative, which functions as an embedded ethical program within the epic. Viewed in this way, we encounter a condensed but complex engagement with the didactic fable (αἶνος) that carries unique implications for our understanding of Homeric speech. In this emergent intergeneric dialogue, we find not only a recasting of existing hierarchies but also a forceful glance back to the grisly feast — and notorious crux — of the poem's opening.

2 Lions, and lions, and lions — Oh my!

Before examining Apollo's particular lion, we should undertake a brief consideration of simile in the *Iliad*, insofar as such a thing is possible.[1] By virtue of their sheer prevalence, the similes of the Homeric epics have received immense scrutiny and inspired numerous interpretations.[2] Modern critics both affirm their narrative significance and move far beyond a musty view of similes as flights of fancy for the poet grown weary of bloody battlefield tableaux.[3] This whistlestop tour of the form must continue to the simile's fundamental linguistic construction using one of the *Iliad*'s shorter leonine examples, here involving Aeneas in the immediate aftermath of Pandarus's slaying by Diomedes: ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ αὐτῷ βαῖνε λέων ὡς ἀλκὶ πεποιθώς […] ("He stepped over him like a lion confident in his strength", *Il.* 5.298). In such a comparison, the lion serves as the vehicle — the thing whose attributes are borrowed — while Aeneas is

1 More complete and illuminating treatments of the topic than this space permits are numerous. Some of the most interesting work on simile in recent years has been refracted through the study of metaphor; see Zanker 2019 (examining Homer specifically) and Donoghue 2014 (on metaphor writ large). For a nimble survey of simile in the wider tradition of Greco-Roman epic, see Gärtner/Blaschka 2019 as well as Feeney 2014.

2 Martin 1997 provides a helpful survey of rhetorical and thematic approaches, proposing himself a fresh 'rhythmic' perspective that Martin sees as evoking a distinctly musical style of performance with intergeneric resonance. See also Minchin 2001, who applies cognitive psychology to the study of Homeric simile.

3 Representatives of this now outmoded view include Bassett 1921 and Bowra 1950. Whitman 1958, 103, presents the simile as almost an intruder on the narrative, "rising like a prismatic inverted pyramid upon its one point of contact with the action".

the tenor, or the thing being described. As Aeneas's example suggests, it is most typically heroes who occupy the role of tenor in the poem. So often, in fact, are heroes compared to lions, specifically, that some measure of tedium is nearly unavoidable for the contemporary reader faced with the latest such simile. A vexing question may arise: while the tenors change, are the vehicles not more or less identical?

Happily, we find a remedy for such doldrums in the work of Jonathan Ready, who has done much to refresh and expand understanding of the Homeric simile by arguing for a sophisticated interplay of "same" and "distinctive" in the content of the poem's comparisons.[4] What we may see as linguistic differences across vehicles, Ready feels Homeric poets envisioned as "same" within certain encompassing templates, producing a narrative in which similes in both the narrator- and character-texts are used to "build on and challenge [...] the previous figuration(s) of the narrator";[5] roiling competition can result as a given simile caps the one previous.[6]

The sameness of a given vehicle's template is never more evident than in the case of lions, who definitively predominate in the poem's comparisons.[7] Ready schematizes the typical features of the lion simile in a comprehensive manner through a terminology of "scenarios", which — drawing on William Scott's approach[8] — he defines as "the irreducible component" that animates the vehicle's construction. Applied broadly to the *Iliad*'s lion similes, Ready identifies the following scenarios:

a. The lion does violence to defenseless livestock.
b. The lion attacks a farmstead with mixed results ("kill *or* be killed"; "kill *and* be killed"; failure and departure).
c. The lion enjoys a "feast".[9]

4 See *passim* Ready 2011.

5 Ready, 2011, 209–210.

6 Here, as he acknowledges, Ready builds on the work of Muellner 1996 in particular.

7 Lions appear in the *Iliad* at 3.21–28; 5.135–143; 5.161–162; 5.299; 5.476; 5.554–560; 5.780–783; 7.255–257; 8.338–341; 10.296–297; 10.485–488; 11.113–121; 11.129–130; 11.172–178; 11.238–240; 11.292–295; 11.382–383; 11.473–484; 11.548–556; 12.41–50; 12.292–293; 12.298–308; 13.197–202; 15.271–278; 15.592; 15.630–638; 16.487–491; 16.751–754; 16.756–761; 16.823–828; 17.61–69; 17.108–113; 17.132–137; 17.540–542; 17.657–666; 18.161–162; 18.318–322 (Achilles); 18.573–589 (Shield of Achilles); 20.164–173 (Achilles); 22.262–266 (Achilles); 24.39–45 (Achilles); 24.572 (Achilles). In the *Odyssey*'s similes, lions feature at 4.35–39; 4.791–792; 6.130–134; 9.292; 17.126–130; 22.402–406; 23.47–48.

8 See Scott 2009, 19, on the concept of the "simileme", which he defines as "the mental structure underlying each simile", that is, "the nonverbal background material shared by poet and audience". Ready 2017, 205, distinguishes his own approach from Scott's insofar as the former believes that the Homeric poet operated not by selecting a vehicle writ large (e.g. a lion) and then considering the simileme for potentially relevant detail; but rather had instant resort to a vehicle as engaged in a particular action (e.g. a lion eating a sheep).

9 Ready 2017, 222–224.

The first two scenarios suggest violence as the end in itself (with varying degrees of retribution), but the third presents a "feast" as the outcome. Of note is that Ready seems to use this term simply to designate the lions' meal as opposed to any especially fine dining. Indeed, the very instances of consumption cited by Ready display all the bloody savagery that we might expect from the big cats: τῆς δ' ἐξ αὐχέν' ἔαξε λαβὼν κρατεροῖσιν ὀδοῦσι | πρῶτον, ἔπειτα δέ θ' αἷμα καὶ ἔγκατα πάντα λαφύσσει ("First the lion breaks her neck caught fast in the strong teeth, then gulps down the blood and all the guts that are inward", viz. *Il.* 11.175–176, 17.63–64).[10] It is, however, precisely the more formal realization of a 'feasting' concept that leads us to the passage at issue in this chapter.

3 Guilt-tripping the gods

Apollo's temper has reached full boil by Book 24's opening. After nearly a fortnight of Achilles desecrating Hector's corpse, the god convenes the Olympians to reproach them for their apparent dereliction in safeguarding sacred norms:

> ἀλλ' ὅτε δή ῥ' ἐκ τοῖο δυωδεκάτη γένετ' ἠώς,
> καὶ τότ' ἄρ' ἀθανάτοισι μετηύδα Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων·
> "σχέτλιοί ἐστε, θεοί, δηλήμονες· οὔ νύ ποθ' ὑμῖν
> Ἕκτωρ μηρί' ἔκηε βοῶν αἰγῶν τε τελείων;
> τὸν νῦν οὐκ ἔτλητε νέκυν περ ἐόντα σαῶσαι,
> ᾗ τ' ἀλόχῳ ἰδέειν καὶ μητέρι καὶ τέκεϊ ᾧ
> καὶ πατέρι Πριάμῳ λαοῖσί τε, τοί κέ μιν ὦκα
> ἐν πυρὶ κήαιεν καὶ ἐπὶ κτέρεα κτερίσαιεν.
> ἀλλ' ὁλοῷ Ἀχιλῆϊ θεοὶ βούλεσθ' ἐπαρήγειν,
> ᾧ οὔτ' ἄρ φρένες εἰσὶν ἐναίσιμοι οὔτε νόημα
> γναμπτὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι, λέων δ' ὣς ἄγρια οἶδεν,
> ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ ἂρ μεγάλῃ τε βίῃ καὶ ἀγήνορι θυμῷ
> εἴξας εἶσ' ἐπὶ μῆλα βροτῶν ἵνα **δαῖτα** λάβῃσιν·
> ὣς Ἀχιλεὺς ἔλεον μὲν ἀπώλεσεν, οὐδέ οἱ αἰδὼς
> γίγνεται, ἥ τ' ἄνδρας μέγα σίνεται ἠδ' ὀνίνησι."
> (*Il.* 24.31–45)

> So when the twelfth day after this had dawned, then Phoebus Apollo addressed the immortals: "Cruel are you, gods, you agents of harm. Did Hector never burn the thighs of unblemished bulls and goats for you? Now you will not bother to preserve him — even as a corpse — for his wife and mother and child to look upon, as well as his father Priam and his people, who would immediately burn him in the fire and bury him honorably. But it is baleful Achilles

10 Ready 2017, 223.

> whom you, gods, wish to aid — he whose mind is irreverent and whose heart's intent is unyielding. Savagery is innate to him, like a lion who when he has yielded to his towering strength and willful spirit advances against the flocks of men to secure for himself a feast (δαῖτα). Just so has Achilles obliterated pity, nor has he a sense of shame, which both harms and helps men mightily."
>
> (Transl. K. McK.)

Apollo vocalizes a glaring contrast in behaviors: Hector, while living, offered proper sacrifices to the gods, who now do no more than look on while his body is mutilated. Achilles, on the other hand, is a monster of immoral excess. At line 41, reaching his climactic judgment of Achilles' character, the god likens him to a lion intent on seizing a feast, here designated as such by the marked lexeme δαίς rather than as an unmarked 'meal' word elevated by a colorful translation. Despite Apollo's powerful statement of condemnation, however, what makes this example much different from the lion similes that have preceded it? Those lions, too, have marauded at will, threatening the very sort of flocks invoked here.

In the first place, this is but the second lion simile to be spoken by a character within the narrative, lending its deployment a uniquely subjective quality as part of the character-text rather than the narrator-text.[11] Notably, the only other spoken lion simile is uttered by Achilles himself. In fact, it is the last lion simile to appear before Apollo's remarks, when Achilles implicitly likens himself to the animal as he disclaims the possibility of any truce with Hector:

> Τὸν δ' ἄρ' ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς·
> "Ἕκτορ, μή μοι, ἄλαστε, συνημοσύνας ἀγόρευε.
> ὡς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὅρκια πιστά,
> οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν,
> ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν,
> ὣς οὐκ ἔστ' ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ φιλήμεναι οὐδέ τι νῶιν
> ὅρκια ἔσσονται, πρίν γ' ἢ ἕτερόν γε πεσόντα
> αἵματος ἆσαι Ἄρηα, ταλαύρινον πολεμιστήν."
> (*Il.* 22.260–267)

> Then eyeing him grimly swift-footed Achilles spoke: "Don't talk to me of dealmaking, Hector, you wretch. Just as lions and men form no trustworthy pacts, nor do wolves and sheep share harmonious feeling — but are instead forever plotting evils against each other — so there's no way for you and me to find fellowship, and there won't be oaths between us until one of us has fallen and filled the fighter Ares, the bull-hide shield-holder, full of his blood."
>
> (Transl. K.McK.)

11 Easy to miss, perhaps, given longstanding negligence towards similes in the character-text; see Ready 2011, 3 n. 6.

Jonathan Ready locates this vehicle's pairing of incorrigible antagonists in fable, looking both to the lines' content,[12] as well as to Achilles' apparent rhetorical purpose. Describing fable as "a genre routinely deployed as a mechanism of blame", Ready observes Achilles' wish to chastise Hector, and in so doing, to distance himself from the norms of heroic epic by spurning the Trojan's generically conventional request.[13] Recalling the 'capping' function noted above for similes, we can see then how Apollo's ascription of a lion's savagery picks up on the hero's self-identification while expanding the scale of its consequences. We will consider the full implications of this development below.

One further peculiarity may be observed in the vehicle of Apollo's apparent simile, centered on the lexeme flagged now several times: *this* lion moves against flocks to get itself a δαίς, a very specific kind of collective meal, namely, one shared among human beings.[14] The δαίς may well be the cornerstone of human coexistence in epic, rooted as it is in ties of community and reciprocity, to the extent that Athenaeus makes a point of affirming the Homeric poet's use of δαίς to describe human consumption alone.[15] Linked closely with sacrifice, it is a ritual occasion with religious significance culminating in the orderly apportionment of a sacrificed animal. As Egbert Bakker describes it, the epic δαίς is predicated upon "division and distribution" and thereby "highlights the symbolic value of food" as opposed to being "a mere act of food consumption".[16] In this way, the δαίς constitutes a crucial institution not only for humanity, but for the gods as well. By seeking a δαίς, Apollo's lion pursues much more than the errant sheep — a marked difference from the broadly construed 'feast' scenario identified by Ready.

12 Ready 2011, 64–69, cites a host of fables featuring shaky oaths between lions and men, ranging from the *Aesopica* to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (examined below), and argues that the influence of fable appears "even more pronounced" in the tension adduced between wolves and sheep owing to the near absence of the pair from epic as well as their "anthropomorphized, cogitating" character in Achilles' depiction.

13 Ready 2011, 66.

14 As to be expected for such a fundamental part of early Greek society, the bibliography here is ample. See Saïd 1979; Strauss Clay 1994; Rundin 1996; Bakker 2013; Stocking 2017.

15 Ath. 1.12–13. This will have relevance for the *Iliad*'s proem as well. On the playful reception of these epic conventions by Babrius, cf. Lukas Spielhofer's contribution in this volume.

16 Bakker 2013, 39.

4 Where lions dare to dine

Because this pairing is so clearly incongruous within an epic setting, our frame of reference for its explication must reach beyond the world of Homeric simile. By comparison, beast fable (as Ready detects in Achilles' rebuke of Hector) offers an accommodating venue for the unlikely convergence of wild animal with human mores. Indeed, in this realm, lions frequently participate in — and even initiate — the δαίς. The lion's relationship with the event, however, is notably fraught.

A fable by Babrius (Babr. 106) offers a revealing paradigm for the lion's style of feasting. It opens with the creature's chief motivation: λέων ποτ᾽ ἀνδρῶν βίον ἄριστον ἐζήλου […] ("Once upon a time a lion tried to emulate the noblest lifestyle of men […]", Babr. 106.1). Presumably this wish to assume the habits of a gentleman could manifest itself in myriad ways, but the fable concerns itself with only one, the δαίς, which the fable presents as the defining feature of civilized human behavior. With this aim in mind, the lion gathers his fellow worthies from the animal kingdom and convenes a recurring dinner party: ὁ δ᾽ εἰστία τε κἀφίλει νόμῳ ξείνων, | ἄδην τιθεὶς ἅπασι δαῖτα θυμήρη ("…and he entertained them and extended his friendship in a hospitable way, laying out for all a lovely feast (δαῖτα) in utter abundance", Babr. 106.7–8). All quite pleasant, it would seem, but the event has engendered a festering resentment in the lion's housemate, a fox, who finds himself increasingly sidelined in the distribution of meat overseen by the appointed carver (δαιτρεύων), an old ape. When the lion at last asks the fox — who by this point is avoiding the feast — what has spurred his irritation, the fox shares his fear for what the gradual diminution of his portion forebodes. To this, the lion simply smiles and tells the fox to blame the ape, not him.

A different story by Babrius depicts similar tensions between lion and fox (Babr. 95). Strikingly, this fable is the longest example of the form known from antiquity and has attracted attention for its epic features.[17] To make a long fable short, the fox manages, after no small effort, to lure a stag into the lion's den for the latter's delectation, culminating in a solitary meal: ἐπεὶ δὲ λόχμης εἰς μυχὸν κατεκλείσθη | λέων μὲν αὐτὸς εἶχε δαῖτα πανθοίνην […] ("Once he had tucked himself into the recesses of his lair, the lion had for himself a bountiful feast (δαῖτα)", Babr. 95.89–90). The fox is left to scrounge for the stag's heart: […] ἡ δ᾽ ἀγωγὸς εἰστήκει | πεινῶσα θήρης καρδίην δὲ νεβρείην | λάπτει πεσοῦσαν ἁρπάσασα λαθραίως, | καὶ τοῦτο κέρδος εἶχεν ὧν ἐκεκμήκει ("…but the escort stood at hand hankering after the game, and when the stag's heart had fallen away, he snatched it in stealth and

17 On this fable's allusions to Homeric poetry, cf. Spielhofer's contribution in this volume.

gobbled it up, and this was such profit as he had for his troubles", Babr. 95.92–95). Even this, however, is greater recompense than the lion seems willing to permit, and the fox must deceive him by citing the stag's foolishness and claiming a consequent lack of καρδία. Not only, then, is the lion a solitary feaster, but he seeks actively to exclude others' involvement beyond their role as caterer or entrée.

Other, similar tensions around fair distribution shadow the lion's relationships in fable, even when the δαίς is not named as such. In one Aesopic tale about a collaborative hunt (Aesop. 149 P. [= 154 Hsr.; 210 Ch.]), a lion has an ass divvy up the resulting shares (μοίρας), but finds such fault with the donkey's equitable apportionment that, enraged, he makes a meal of his carver. The fox whom the lion then tasks with assuming the role takes the hint, piling the greatest share of meat in one heap with only a morsel for himself. When asked by the lion about his eccentric allocation, the fox names his inspiration — the ass's fate. Fables from Babrius (Babr. 67) and Phaedrus (Phaed. 1.5 Z. [= G.]) depict analogous scenarios. In the former, a lion and an ass undertake a hunt as partners, only to have the lion divide their haul into three portions (μοίρας) and justify assigning each to himself. Phaedrus's tale alters and increases the other members of the hunting party to include a cow, goat, and sheep, none of whom fares any better in the division of spoils; this lion simply produces an additional reason to explain his seizure of all four portions. The epimythium is telling: *sic totam praedam sola improbitas abstulit* ("And so audacity alone carried off the booty in its entirety", Phaed. 1.5.11).

What unites these narratives is the disequilibrium inherent to the pairing of lion and δαίς, both when the feast is named explicitly as such and when its norms guide the planned apportionment of meat. Notably, too, the feast or apportionment — and the lion's relationship to it — is consistently the fable's operative element; it is not, in other words, incidental to other goings-on in the fable but is instead the focus. There is no particularly "happy" ending for the other diners when the lion is involved in this ritual division: at least one other character is left dissatisfied or dead (or scrambling to escape this fate) by the fable's close. The lion is seen either actively overstepping the guardrails intended to ensure a stabilizing sense of reciprocity or simply ignoring them altogether. It is, perhaps, to be expected that the lion would receive a share commensurate with his elite status in the animal kingdom,[18] but the depiction in fable carries this to such an extreme that other would-be diners are provided no share at all. The lion's insatiable appetite produces a δαίς that risks the rest of the community's paradoxical starvation. While these animal fables do not feature human beings who are threatened directly by the lion's

18 This status is itself oftentimes a mirror for human power, on which see the helpful overview of Greek and Near Eastern evidence in Ulanowski 2015.

behavior, humankind is, in a way, menaced implicitly in the perversion of its prerogatives.[19]

So plain is the negative association of lion and δαίς that it seems almost to attain a proverbial level of social disruption. The accompanying narratives are, of course, what establish this picture, but the persistent scenario of the lion taking more than his share, or somehow impinging on the fair share of others, suggests that the lion's role in the feast is fundamentally transgressive and disordered, and oftentimes dangerous. To pair "lion and δαίς" may be enough to summon the audience's anticipatory feeling that something is due to go awry, with damaging and even existential consequences. Consider, in a modern context, the similarly condensed pairing of "the bull in a China shop": rare is the listener who wonders whether the animal's presence is a boon or a bother for the shopkeeper.

In addition to these freestanding fable narratives, we find an even more proximate analogue for Apollo's lion — both chronologically and in its embedded construction — in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. This famous merger of beast and feast appears in the second strophe of the third stasimon (*Ag*. 717–736), as the chorus of Argive elders narrates an unsettling tale about a lion reared at home like a human child; docile in its youth, it matures into the instinctual savagery of its species. The outcome is predictably grisly, albeit with a twist:

χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων
μηλοφόνοισι μάταισιν
δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν,
αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη,
ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις,
μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.
ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεύς τις ἄ-
τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη.
(Aesch. *Ag*. 727–736)

Once grown up, it displayed the disposition (ἦθος) of its parents, repaying its foster family by preparing a surprise banquet (ἀκέλευστος δαῖτα) of sheep-slaughtering destruction. The

19 Humans do intersect with a lion in Phaed. 2.1 Z. [= G.], when the creature rejects the attempt of an *improbus* to share in his kill, while permitting another man to approach and take a portion because of his *modestia*. Even this seeming validation of good order, however, is turned on its head by the fabulist's epimythium: *Exemplum egregium prorsus et laudabile; | verum est aviditas dives et pauper pudor* ("This is, by all means, a noble example and should be praised; but in truth greed is wealthy and propriety poor", 11–12). Even as the lion seems to behave in an upstanding way, his actions are revealed to contradict society's "normal" operation.

> house was bathed in blood, an overwhelming anguish for the household, a massive and murderous plague. A god saw to it that what had been raised as a housemate was a priest of Ruin. (Transl. K.McK.)

The lion embraces its ἦθος in transgressing against its human caretakers, crafting a δαίς whose destructive qualities threaten the community's very existence. In fact, the direct evocation of sheep slaughter may point towards an implicit massacre of the house's human inhabitants, an ambiguity that also surfaces in Apollo's Iliadic presentation.[20]

Of course, the Aeschylean passage is treated not as a simile within the play but as a fable, or αἶνος, a distinct genre with origins in archaic Greek poetry. Gregory Nagy describes the αἶνος as being at its most fundamental level "a performance conveying a meaning that needs to be interpreted and then applied in moments of making moral decisions".[21] We can add to this several features typically associated with the form: it is explicitly fictitious; it represents a distinct event taking place in the past through the actions of distinct characters; it is related not only as a story *per se* but told in order to make a point (i.e. there is a moral to these stories); it is metaphorical.[22] Moreover it requires a clever audience, a dynamic that Deborah Steiner captures succinctly: since an αἶνος "challenges its audience to decipher a covert meaning, telling a fable is a test of its targets' acumen".[23] Steiner applies this framing both to the paradigmatic αἶνος of "The Hawk and Nightingale" in Hesiod's *Works and Days* as well as to fables from Archilochus and Aesop, observing the uniquely contentious uses to which αἶνοι are put as "competitive devices deployed […] within agonistic situations […] [involving] issues of opposing poetics, modes of discourse, and genres", with an ultimate aim of "political-cum-civic authority".[24] In this context of debate, whether ethical or generic, the speaker's very status may hang in the balance.

20 At *Il.* 24.43 we observe the potential bivalence of βροτῶν, whether indicating the possessors of the flocks *or* serving as the content of the δαίς.

21 Nagy 2007, 63. On αἶνος, cf. Bottini (in this volume).

22 For the bases of this synthesized typology, see Perry 1952; van Dijk 1997; Kurke 2010. See also in this volume the introductory remarks by Ursula Gärtner and Lukas Spielhofer on fable as "a type of text or textual element recognizable to a group of recipients".

23 Steiner 2012, 6. Nagy 1990, 148, sees the well-defined audience delineated by fable as comprised of σοφοί (they can decipher the message of the αἶνος), ἀγαθοί (they are versed in the relevant ethical norms), and φίλοι (they are well equipped to understand the speaker by virtue of their existing fellowship with that speaker). On the possible role of fables in actual oratory, cf. Damian Pierzak's contribution in this volume.

24 Steiner 2012, 1–2.

This is not to say that similes themselves cannot play a comparable role in moments of rhetorical competition; indeed, we have already noted their frequent capacity to serve this function in the *Iliad*.[25] However, the moral cast of the αἶνος, and the surreal or supernatural abilities that the beast fable most typically entails — that is, animals speaking or acting like human beings — render the genre distinct from the simile and its normal "rhythms of nature".[26] This returns us to *Iliad* 24, where Apollo, it would appear, is now the rhetorical competitor *par excellence*, of the kind that Steiner's "agonistic situations" necessitate. He speaks in assembly, pleading his case, attempting to persuade his fellow divinities of the moral rectitude of his position against the injustice of Achilles' behavior. Still further, he decries the gods' inaction as its own form of injustice, in a way an ancient manifestation of the contemporary dictum that 'silence is violence'.[27]

Apollo's moralizing purpose, conveyed through a metaphorical fiction of lion and feast, may point us towards a condensed but intelligible αἶνος narrative. This, in turn, may indicate a traditional fable template. Between *Iliad* 24 and Aeschylus — and taking into account the examples surveyed above from the wider tradition of fable literature — the elements of this template are apparent enough: a lion transcends the bounds of the animal world to secure for itself a human feast — a δαίς — with consequences that threaten social order. If, for example, Aeschylus represents a more complete rendition (and one that places the lion within a domestic setting from the start), Apollo's version is no less meaningful in its messaging, simply because the pairing of lion and δαίς is so conspicuous. There is also a moral to this story, in the manner that we might expect for a fable; in fact, the so-called epimythium is generally regarded as a standard feature of the genre.[28] Here Apollo

25 Ready 2011 is especially concerned with this use, examining the "competitive dynamics" of the *Iliad*'s similes most fully in chapters 4 and 5.

26 As Buxton 2004, 152, describes the simile's world. The named features of the αἶνος here might be supplemented by the helpful accounting of Ben Edwin Perry's parameters for beast fable in Ziolkowski 1990, 8–10. These 'rules' are as follows: a fictitious narrative; the recounting of a "single action, short chain of actions, or speech that took place once in the past"; the performance of those actions by "specific characters"; and the purpose of a fable as being "for the sake of a moral, not merely for entertainment". van Dijk 1997, 6–7 notes the exceptions to these rules and questions several of Ziolkowski's characterizations.

27 The uniquely contentious dimensions of this appearance are made evident in Hera's response at 24.55–63. On the deep mythology potentially underlying this antagonism, see Burgess 2004 and Mackie 2013.

28 It is what Holzberg 1993 calls a "Schlußwort" and sees as part of a nearly formulaic structure. Strong 2021, 384–385, captures the more measured general reception of the epimythium, noting that while its absence is "common enough", its appearance serves as "a straightforward genre indicator that a given text is a fable".

holds forth on Achilles' obliteration of pity (ἔλεος) and lack of shame (αἰδώς), which, as the god avers, ἄνδρας μέγα σίνεται ἠδ' ὀνίνησι. ("harms and helps men mightily", *Il.* 24.45).[29] Shame constitutes "a central notion in the world of values in the *Iliad* and denotes an inhibition against violating others or attracting their displeasure", while pity in the epic's final book represents "the most effective motivation on both the divine [...] and human planes".[30] Apollo, in other words, concludes his compressed beast fable with those concepts likeliest to be felt by his listeners as a basis for reproach and, in turn, most certain to spur them to action. Furthermore, the god may tap into the leitmotif of shamelessness that surfaces in the fabulistic lion's δαίς: as the Phaedrian fable seen earlier (1.5 Z. [= G.]) states explicitly in its epimythium, *improbitas* ("audacity") is embodied in the lion's wanton behavior.

Certainly, the visceral force of combining lion and δαίς ought not be overlooked by a contemporary audience potentially desensitized to dogs playing poker or Bugs Bunny as the Rabbit of Seville. Far more than a colorful (or absurd) word choice for dinner, the lion's pursuit of a δαίς imposes an encompassing framework of moral norms and their looming violation, just as the lion's embrace of its ἦθος in *Agamemnon* is inimical to the ethical fabric of the οἶκος. If Achilles is allowed to proceed in his depredations, Apollo warns, it will be little different from a lion permitted to procure for himself a human banquet. While no single feature of these lines long viewed solely as a simile renders them instantly as fable, their totality points us in the direction of a deep, and here compressed, fable narrative underlying a typical simile's formatting.[31] Conversely, if we foreclose the possibility of a fable template embedded in Apollo's simile, we are left with only a colorful word choice and a rather toothless rhetoric: just another lion, it would seem, craving yet another mutton dinner, albeit with a gruesome (if vacuous) frisson.[32]

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29 Brügger 2017, *ad loc.*, observes the challenge of this line since αἰδώς "ought to have an entirely positive connotation in accord with Apollo's intention"; this difficulty led Aristarchus to athetize the line. The basis for preservation, however, as "a generalizing description of the effects" of αἰδώς might itself seem to comport with the function of an epimythium. An alternative approach cited (albeit skeptically) by Brügger would only further this connection: "he who lacks *aidṓs* suffers harm, he who has it is at an advantage".

30 Brügger 2017, *ad* 24.44. Apollo's seeming epimythium can be compared profitably with the observations that follow Hesiod's "The Hawk and the Nightingale" concerning δίκη and its express application to humankind rather than animals (Hes. *Op.* 274–280).

31 And surely compression alone should not disqualify such a reading. See Scodel 2002, 124–154, on the centrality of "abbreviated narrative" to the Homeric epics more generally.

32 Bakker 2010, 40–43 provides a helpful reminder that the hero has rejected sustenance previously in demonstrating his "extreme mourning" for Patroclus, suggesting here that it would be rather silly for Apollo to paint Achilles as simply a *food*-obsessed lion. The added emphasis in Apollo's framing on the θυμός driving Achilles, as opposed to the lowly γαστήρ, further underlines the

Yet the choice of lexeme hardly seems careless given that Apollo has offered only one previous simile in the poem, reflecting a marked degree of selectivity in his character-text. At that moment, several books earlier, the god had urged détente with Poseidon by observing the absurdity of gods enmeshing themselves in the disputes of pathetic mortals, comparing humans to fast-decaying leaves (21.461–467). If only recently Apollo had been loath to enmesh himself in disputes involving mortals alone, what has changed by Book 24?[33] The god's engagement with fable emphasizes the heightened — indeed, universal — ethical stakes of this dispute: Achilles' transgression exceeds the realm of human conflict to destabilize divine prerogatives. This use of fable may function, in turn, as a mirror image of what Ready finds in Achilles' recourse to fable at *Iliad* 22.260–267.[34] As noted above, Ready sees Achilles' reference to fable narratives involving distrust between lions and men, wolves and sheep, as emblematic of the warrior's rejection of the heroic code of behavior. Just as Apollo appropriates Achilles' language to reinterpret, and thereby escalate, the identification of the warrior with an explicitly out-of-control lion, I suggest that the god inverts the hero's purpose as a fable-teller, too. In Achilles' turn as a fabulist, he knocks the epic narrative off-kilter by summoning a distinct genre to disrupt epic norms. Here, Apollo resorts to fable to steady those same conventions, in this case as they pertain to treatment of the dead.[35]

Thus, by so decoding this αἶνος, we find that our own generic hierarchies have been destabilized. Beast fable is ostensibly a 'low' genre markedly distinct from the lofty ideals of Homeric epic, and therefore absent from *Iliad* or *Odyssey* — a

greater signification of δαίς beyond a hearty meal. On the contrast between these motivations, see again Bakker 2010, which elaborates on Pucci 1987, 157–187.

33 Indeed it is *Hera* who feels compelled to respond with a version of Apollo's appeal to divine supremacy, arguing at 24.58–61 that Hector, a mortal breastfed by a woman (Ἕκτωρ μὲν θνητός τε γυναῖκά τε θήσατο μαζόν), must not be afforded the same regard as Achilles, the child of a goddess whom Hera herself had a hand in rearing (αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς ἐστι θεᾶς γόνος, ἣν ἐγὼ αὐτὴ θρέψα τε καὶ ἀτίτηλα).

34 This kind of mirroring fits more broadly into the poem's presentation of Apollo and Achilles, on which see Rabel 1990.

35 If Achilles uses fable to interrogate epic, we might wonder if Apollo's generic interplay does the reverse, for which Swift 2014 provides a useful point of reference. Of Hesiod's "The Hawk and the Nightingale" she writes that the poet's αἶνος constitutes a "twist on the conventions of the animal fable, since by stressing the ethical differences between humans and animals his coda questions the meaningfulness of the fable genre", while Archilochus' αἶνος of fox and eagle "reminds us of the gap between humans and animals, and the artificiality of a genre which presents them as moral equivalents" (72–73). If pertinent to Apollo's engagement with fable, I feel that such probing in the character-text would be nonetheless distinct from the dominant view of generic hierarchy that *excludes* beast fable outright from the narrative.

supposition that tends to persist in study of the two genres.[36] This strictly hierarchical conception of intergeneric engagement, however, may obscure deeper points of contact of the kind that we encounter here, and that surely existed in the interaction of different oral traditions in archaic Greek poetry.[37] We are invited to find the reality of "Homeric inclusiveness" not just in terms of the epic audience's composition but also through the intergeneric dialogue in which such an audience would surely have been fluent.[38] Indeed, once we acknowledge the imprint of beast fable, it is as though the epic poet pokes fun at the very notion of generic hierarchy such as it has developed in the millennia since: the fabulist in Book 24 is no Thersites, but a god, and a notably decorous one at that. Perhaps generic hierarchies better reflect modern sensibilities than ancient. Recognizing the role of an ur-fable in elevating what might otherwise be a bog-standard lion simile illuminates a still richer moral and poetic resonance in the god's rhetoric.

5 Back to the future

The deeper poetics binding lion with δαίς draw us back to the *Iliad*'s beginning to another proleptic feast, this one a site of famous text-critical disputation. Here is the poem's opening as it appears in the manuscripts and scholia available to us:

> Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληιάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
> οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
> πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
> ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
> οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή, 5
> (*Il.* 1.1–5)
>
> Sing, goddess, the hateful rage of Peleus' son Achilles, which stuck the Achaeans with sorrows innumerable and dispatched many hardy souls of heroes to Hades, and made the men themselves spoil for dogs and every manner of bird — and the will of Zeus was accomplished.
> (Transl. K.McK.)

36 Kurke 2006, 8–9, describes the place of fable in terms of "generic and sociopolitical abjection" and observes that beast fables appear in Hesiod "but never in Homer's elitist epic". See also Rothwell 1995.

37 Ancient critics may agree: see van Dijk 1997, 124–137, who notes that Theon and Philostratus both "put [Homer] on a par with fabulists", even as he stresses that "[f]ables occur only in didactic, not in heroic epic".

38 The phrase is borrowed from Scodel 2002, 173. She stresses the "actual social inclusiveness of epic performance" in contrast to the reading of *inter alios* Morris 1986, which locates Homeric poetry as part of a wider social program of elite control.

It is, however, Zenodotus' reading of δαῖτα for πᾶσι (transmitted to us only by Athenaeus) that has relevance here, rendering lines 4–5 as "[…] and made the men themselves spoil for dogs and a †feast (δαῖτα) for birds".[39] Aristarchus dismisses the reading without explicit explanation, though Rudolf Pfeiffer voices the generally accepted view that "it is Aristarchean to observe the poet's usage, to reject *daita* in the sense of animal food as non-Homeric, and to charge Zenodotus with ἄγνοια".[40] This assessment clearly colored the ensuing centuries of the lines' reception, but Pfeiffer notes the significance of "rare concord of the three tragedians" in alluding to the version of the proem familiar to Zenodotus.[41] Clearly δαῖτα was circulating widely in the fifth century. The probative value of its place in the textual tradition is bolstered still further on stylistic grounds. As Joachim Latacz observes, "Die Klimax der aufgezählten Schrecklichkeiten […] würde nach verbreiteter Ansicht durch ein komisch wirkendes 'und den Vögeln allen' zunichte gemacht".[42] To this Pfeiffer adds, tellingly, the absence of Aristarchus's view on *Iliad* 24.43, leaving us to wonder how he might have grappled with a second δαίς linked to an animal.[43]

Despite this body of countervailing evidence in favor of Zenodotus' reading, it is rare for an editor to prioritize δαῖτα. Let us, however, recognize for the moment the multiform nature of the Homeric text, and embrace here this alternative window onto the poem that Zenodotus provides in order to understand more completely the δαίς of Book 24. In Zenodotus' rendering of the proem, the rage of Achilles sends countless souls to Hades and makes their corpses spoil for dogs and, yes, a feast for birds. It is, of course, the very perversion of nature's order entailed in this act that so offended Aristarchus' sensibilities. As he recognized, animals in the context of archaic Greek poetry should be a δαίς for people — not the other way around. Yet the poet rationalizes this reversal immediately: in the animals' feasting on humans, the will of Zeus is accomplished.[44] This is surely accurate as it relates to the poem's development. As readers (and listeners) of the poem well know, Achilles is given license by Zeus to harness his rage in a way that will have catastrophic

39 Again Ath. 1.12–13.

40 Pfeiffer 1968, 112.

41 Pfeiffer 1968, 111. The lines are Aesch. *Supp.* 800–801, Soph. *Ant.* 29–30, and Eur. *Ion* 504–506.

42 Latacz/Nünlist/Stoevesandt 2000, *ad loc.* ("The climax of the enumerated horrors […] would, according to a widespread view, be cancelled out by a comical 'and all the birds'").

43 Pfeiffer 1968, 112 n. 2. Pfeiffer attributes the critic's silence to our own poorly preserved scholia for Book 24. He speculates that Aristarchus "may not have had the simile in his text or he may have constructed βροτῶν ἵνα δαῖτα".

44 The bibliography on the significance of Zeus' will for the poem's narrative is substantial. A representative smattering might include Murnaghan 1997; Elmer 2013, 153–173; Allan 2008; Pucci 2018.

consequences for the Achaeans. A δαίς comprised of humans, enjoyed by animals, is all part of the broader plan.

That is, until Book 24, when Apollo gives voice to the view that Achilles has been allowed to proceed too far in his freedom to wreak havoc. Hector, as we have seen, made proper sacrifices; Achilles, as a lion in search of a δαίς, aims to disrupt the normative workings of sacrifice to the gods and reciprocity among humans. The fact that the lion will "seize" (λάβῃσιν) the δαίς is antithetical to the feast's very basis in fair distribution.[45] Apollo moreover reminds his audience that bodies simply should not be left unburied as meals for animals.[46] We see the gods behaving in a manner familiar from the monarchs of tragedy, whether Creon in *Antigone* or the Atreids in *Ajax*.[47] What these rulers fail to understand, and consequently must have communicated to them by others, is that a corpse demands special treatment, even if the body belonged to an enemy in life. Apollo articulates this idea explicitly when he protests that the gods are denying Hector their proper regard "even though he is a corpse" (νέκυν περ ἐόντα, *Il.* 24.35); they persist in a position of enmity that has been made untenable by the fact of Hector's death. Thus, while the vision of a lion securing his δαίς is focused on Achilles and his violent revenge, it simultaneously taps a larger narrative network of ethical repugnance at the disgrace of a human body left to the predations of animal feasters.

In this way, by adopting an adversarial stance vis-à-vis Achilles' actions, Apollo stakes out a polemical position to both the will of Zeus and the poetic narrative itself. Apollo rejects the rationalization of the proem — a beastly δαίς sanctioned by Zeus — and instead argues that this final and most grotesque instantiation of the feast threatens the cosmic order. In other words, in his effort to enhance Achilles' τιμή by staging a macabre banquet, Zeus has now overindulged the hero's appetite — a macroscale peril that may not actually lie much distant from the microlevel of the fabulistic tradition. There, too, the lion is essentially concerned for securing the status he feels he deserves and his associated share of the spoil. The problem arises when,

45 Fairness here not necessarily being synonymous with equality: see Rundin 1996, 181–205 on the distinction and resulting tension. See, too, Tewksbury 2023 arguing that the δαίς aims to make concrete an ideal patron-dependent relationship, thereby enforcing a set social hierarchy.

46 See van der Plas 2021, which builds from Segal 1971 in arguing that instances of corpse mutilation in the *Iliad* feature a carefully constructed sequence encompassing escalation and climax.

47 The latter drama is especially apposite: at the moment of peak tension between Teucer and Menelaus concerning the proper burial of the eponymous hero's corpse, both men turn to fable (1142–1158) in staking out their positions. The tensions surfaced in the debates of epic and tragedy have immense relevance for contemporary conflicts and their associated "necropolitics", which often entail withholding corpses and imposing restrictions on bereavement. See as an introduction to the concept Mmembe 2003.

in the process, he infringes on the participation of other community members by seizing *their* portions, too; that is no longer a proper δαίς but a glut. We might note that Achilles has consented in Book 23 to the conciliatory δαίς owed him by Agamemnon (23.35–56), signaling the restoration of his status and his acceptance of compensation; in slaying Hector, he has also, of course, had his revenge for Patroclus' death. By this point in the narrative, then, Achilles' campaign to reassert his τιμή has exceeded reasonable bounds, and the hero now grasps at excess and enormity, much like the feasting lion of fable.

The metapoetic tension aroused by Apollo's challenge to the proem's δαίς may even gesture towards a variant narrative tradition latent in the epic. As David Elmer observes, a medieval manuscript documents an alternative proem for the *Iliad* that centers Apollo "as the moving force behind the plot and thereby minimizes the importance of Zeus as architect", with the result of an "Iliadic tradition that is anchored in a particularly direct way to Apollo's point of view, at the expense of Zeus".[48] Elmer contrasts this with the more balanced perspective of our *Iliad*, but the opposition that Apollo articulates in Book 24 — and the glaring conjunction of beast and δαίς that he uses in mounting his resistance to the narrative's development — mark out our text's ethical polarities in a striking manifestation of the epic's narrative doubling.[49]

This would seem to indicate that, even as Apollo brings the poem's narrative to a halt, he has been listening carefully the entire time. Seen as an αἶνος, the god's speech nearly breaks the epic's fourth wall, not only by hearkening back to the poem's opening, but by reaching into the world of simile to engage with what is, by this point in the *Iliad*, a reflexive association of Achilles with a lion. This simile type, which otherwise is applied widely in the epic, is used exclusively for Achilles once the warrior retakes the battlefield.[50] Furthermore, as we have seen previously, the last appearance of a lion simile has been in Achilles' own mouth, likening himself

48 Elmer 2013, 155–156.

49 Fenik 1974 largely initiated reexamination of Homeric doublets' importance for the narrative. Kelly 2007 is especially relevant here for his proposal of "increasing doublets" whereby a second example of a template is "magnified and contextualized by reference to its smaller partner" so as to establish "an interpretative primacy […] for the second element, by enabling a completion of the themes or actions exhibited in the first sequence, and so binding the narrative together" (382). A further echo may perhaps be heard at *Il.* 24.405–415, when Priam asks Hermes whether Hector's corpse has been fed to Achilles' dogs: the god reassures Priam that neither dogs *nor* birds have had repast at the hero's expense. Any "collective meal" of the animal kingdom plotted by Apollo's lion, and foretold in the proem, has been foiled at last.

50 We see this at 18.318–322; 18.573–589 (Shield of Achilles); 20.164–173; 22.262–266; 24.572; and, of course, at 24.39–45.

to a savage lion. By replicating the epic simile's leonine imagery, but recasting it in moral terms suited to the moment, the Homeric poet has Apollo produce a legible framework for his argument — one that is embedded within the poem's own world even as it extends into new generic territory. As Steven Lonsdale observes of another αἶνος, Hesiod's famous "The Hawk and the Nightingale", it is "not an independent, self-contained narrative with an internal conversation, but interacts thematically and linguistically with its place in the poem".[51] A deep fable pattern drawing in lion, δαίς, and resulting transgression is very much at home in the *Iliad*'s world.

6 One last lion

Apollo's αἶνος functions as intended, redirecting Zeus' will (24.65–76) — and the track of the narrative — from corpse desecration to the ransom of Hector's body by Priam. Notably there is only one lion simile remaining in the *Iliad*, as the Trojan king meets with Achilles (24.568–575). Once they have spoken, Achilles concludes their conversation with a brisk word of warning that nonetheless suggests his changed perspective. Now the warrior wishes to *avoid* transgressing epic norms by maintaining his composure and preserving the life of his suppliant, Priam. It is no longer Zeus' will that countless human lives be sacrificed as a feast for animals or that heroic dictates of interpersonal behavior be subverted. But the threat of these possibilities lingers for a moment longer. As the old man sits in terrified silence, Achilles leaps to the door like a lion, a comparison whose visceral menace swiftly dissipates in the realization that Achilles is beginning the process of returning Hector's body. Now, instead of the isolated evildoer of Apollo's αἶνος, we see him in company with Automedon and Alcimus, the men described as the friends dearest to him after Patroclus. Community, reciprocity, and moral order have been restored.

The interplay of lion and δαίς offers a subtle but distinctive structure for the poem's narrative. The same ghastly array of imagery that in the proem portends looming battlefield carnage then becomes the focal point in a persuasive fable putting a stop to the poem's slaughter. Here, at epic's end, the image of the lion marks yet one more narrative turn — the first step towards the *Iliad*'s final funeral.

51 Lonsdale 1989, 405. It is, in fact, for this reason that Lonsdale sees Hesiod's αἶνος as a hybrid, straddling the realms of fable and omen, an argument for the fable's very generic fluidity in the *Iliad*, as well. Apollo's αἶνος taps into the epic's own bestiary while accessing a deeper and morally networked narrative pattern. On the relationship between the fable of hawk and nightingale and the narrative in which Hesiod embeds it, cf. also Bruno Currie's contribution in this volume.

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Part II: **Fable and Elegy**

Giovanni Zago

The Fables of Avianus: Intersection of Genres and Textual Criticism

Abstract: As a poet and fable author, Avianus may frequently appear clumsy and imprecise; therefore, in many passages it is difficult for the textual critic to determine whether 'errors' in syntax, prosody, or narrative construction should be attributed to the author himself or to the copyists. However, Avianus was unquestionably a learned man and an avid reader of the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages. Hence, for the purposes of textual criticism and interpretation, intertextual analysis is an extraordinarily effective tool, since in some passages it reveals that the transmitted text, apparently corrupt, is actually sound, while in others it is the key to healing a paradosis that is indeed corrupt. In Avianus' case, intertextual analysis must be intergeneric, because Avianus tended to mix different poetic genres (fable, epic, tragedy, elegy, comedy, lyric) to create his own poetic *parole*. Four passages from Avianus are treated in this paper: in two of them (Avian. 6.7–8; 35.1–4) intertextual analysis shows that the transmitted text should not be altered; in the third and fourth (Avian. 34.5–12; 3.5–6) it inspires emendations. This paper also demonstrates that Avianus was familiar with the poems of Catullus.

1 Introduction

Even though distinguished scholars (including giants such as Lachmann and Baehrens) have spent much time and labour on Avianus' fables in elegiac couplets, many philological problems remain unsolved, and no satisfactory critical edition has appeared to date. As Shackleton Bailey wrote, all editions of Avianus' fables "are alike in presenting many readings which no critical reader can swallow, whether produced by the carelessness of copyists or the wayward fancies of the editors".[1] The editions of Lachmann, Froehner, and Baehrens, who edited Avianus in the fifth volume of his glorious *Poetae Latini Minores*,[2] offer good conjectures but go too far in their attempt to normalize the prosody, language, and narrative style of Avianus. By contrast, the editions of Guaglianone and Gaide,[3] who had a broader knowledge

1 Shackleton Bailey 1978, 295.

2 Lachmann 1845; Froehner 1862; Baehrens 1883.

3 Guaglianone 1958; Gaide 1980.

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of the manuscript transmission than their predecessors, are marred by overly conservative textual choices. More cautious than Lachmann, Froehner, and Baehrens, but less conservative than Gaide and Guaglianone, were J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff, who edited Avianus in their Loeb of the *Minor Latin Poets*.[4] The text printed by Duff/Duff is overall the best available text of Avianus but is far from satisfactory. A new critical edition is therefore desirable. To fill this philological gap, I am preparing the new *editio Teubneriana* of the fables of Avianus, which will provide several new textual suggestions and will rely on a fresh examination of the manuscript transmission and on a careful evaluation of the philological studies that have appeared so far.

Editing Avianus is a difficult task; to quote Hermann Fränkel, the working hypothesis of textual critics sounds like this: "the author [...] always knows best what to say and how to say it".[5] Judgments about Avianus' poetry vary. In the opinion of Browning, "Avianus can scarcely be called a poet. His tasteless, strained, imprecise Latin, with its constant inappropriate Vergilian reminiscences, might have been written by a nineteenth-century public schoolboy".[6] Other scholars, *inter quos* Küppers, have observed that Avianus was unable to adequately combine content and artistic form.[7] Some have been more generous; for example, La Penna, in the Latin *Praefatio* to the Teubner edition of Babrius, wrote that Avianus "poeticam orationem elaborauit nouam et sibi propriam, dignitate et ornamentis auctam", and that his style is mostly elegant ("plerumque expeditus cum elegantia incedit"), although sometimes clumsy and convoluted ("aliquando uiam salebrosam temptat").[8] It is clear, at any rate, that Avianus can hardly be regarded as the kind of poet who always knows what needs to be said and how it can be said best, so his text is often uncertain from the point of view of both textual criticism and interpretation. Often, in fact, we are unable to determine whether 'errors' in syntax, prosody, or narrative construction are to be attributed to the author or to the copyists. In many cases, however, we can use an extraordinarily effective tool to establish and interpret the text. This tool is intertextual analysis. As a poet and fabulist Avianus may frequently appear clumsy, but he was unquestionably a learned man and an avid reader of the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages, a reader particularly fond of Vergil, whom he knew by heart. It can be said that the prevailing tone of the language

4 Duff/Duff 1934.

5 Fränkel 1964, 139: "Der Autor (so lautet unsere Arbeitshypothese) weiß immer am besten was zu sagen ist und wie es zu sagen ist".

6 Browning 1960, 42.

7 Küppers 1977, 100 n. 2.

8 La Penna *apud* Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, XIX.

of Avianus is not only elaborately poetic, but specifically Vergilian.[9] Every fable (if not every elegiac couplet) has echoes or actual imitations of the *Aeneid*; but even when not distinctly modelled on Vergil, the style of Avianus is artificial, not least because Avianus tended to mix different poetic genres (fable, epic, tragedy, elegy, comedy, lyric) to create his own poetic *parole*. For the purposes of the *constitutio textus* it is therefore extremely important to identify the poetic models of Avianus couplet by couplet. Much work has been done in this field, especially by Cannegieter, whose annotated edition was a milestone in the study of Avianus,[10] and by Ellis, whose commentary, notable for its ample and unborrowed learning,[11] is still worth perusing.[12] However, much remains to be discovered. For instance, no one has ever noticed that Avianus was familiar with the poems of Catullus. In my opinion, in fact, Avian. 9.21 *magna quidem monuit, tamen haec quoque maxima iussit* echoes Catull. 115.7 *omnia magna haec sunt, tamen ipsest maximus ultro*, for *maximus* in Catullus and *maxima* in Avianus occur in the same metrical position, as does *tamen*, and in both passages the first hemistich contains the word *magna*; this cannot be accidental. How should we interpret this intertextual connection? In my opinion, it is either an unconscious reminiscence or a 'nonreferential' imitation (that is, a conscious imitation that does not aim to evoke its source), because it seems very unlikely to me that Avianus intended here to remind his reader of the obscene context in which Catullus' line occurs. This reminiscence (or 'nonreferential' imitation) is nonetheless significant, since, on the one hand, it offers a small contribution to the yet-to-be-written history of Catullus' Late Antique *Fortleben*, and, on the other, it shows that Avianus had read at least one poem by Catullus — something that, as I have said, has hitherto not been noticed.[13]

9 See Ellis 1887, XXXIV–XXXV.

10 Cannegieter 1731.

11 Ellis 1887.

12 On the poetic models of Avianus, see also Mayor 1887. There is nothing original, as far as I have seen, in Scanzo 2001.

13 On Avianus and Catullus, see Zago 2021a, 14. In Zago 2023, 191–194 I detected in a passage of Avianus a probable borrowing from Lucretius, an author who had never been regarded as a possible hypotext for him. On reminiscences and 'nonreferential' imitations in Late Antique poetry, see the interesting disquisition by Pelttari 2014, 114–137.

2 Examples

2.1 Intergeneric intertextuality as proof of the soundness of the transmitted text

I will now dwell on two passages from Avianus in which intergeneric intertextuality proves that the transmitted text, apparently corrupt, is actually sound. Both passages baffled a towering figure in the Latin textual criticism of the last century, Shackleton Bailey, who forty-five years ago published a set of brilliant critical notes on Avianus' fables.[14]

The first passage is:

> nec se Paeonio iactat cessisse magistro,
> quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos.
> (Avian. 6.7–8)

> Her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master,[15] though he attends the everlasting gods in turn.
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

The subject is a frog posing as a healer. I have quoted the transmitted text. Shackleton Bailey, like Ellis 1887, Duff/Duff 1934, and the ThlL (s.v. *orbis*, 912.26–28), believes that in this context *in orbe* cannot mean anything but "in rotation", "in turn". A parallel could be cited in support of this interpretation, namely a passage from the pseudo-Vergilian *Aetna*:

> [...] uer, prima iuuenta,
> cur aestate perit, cur aestas ipsa senescit
> autumnoque obrepit hiems et in orbe recurrit. 240
> (*Aetna* 238–240)

> Why spring, the youthful prime of the year, dies in summer, why summer herself grows old, and winter creeps up on autumn and completes the cycle.
> (Transl. Hine)

Shackleton Bailey, however, rightly remarks that if *in orbe* is interpreted as "in rotation" the sense is scarcely satisfactory. Why should the gods fall ill one after the other, in rotation? Withof proposed *is arte* for the transmitted *in orbe*. The sense

14 Shackleton Bailey 1978.

15 *Scil.* Apollo.

would be "her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master, though he skilfully cures the everlasting gods".[16] For his part, Shackleton Bailey corrected *in orbe* to *in arce*, suggesting this alteration on the basis of the source of Avianus' fable, i.e. Babr. 120, in which the frog says:

> Ἰατρός εἰμι φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμων,
> οἵων ταχ' οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδ' ὁ Παιήων, 5
> ὃς Ὄλυμπον οἰκεῖ καὶ θεοὺς ἰατρεύει.
> (Babr. 120.4–6)
>
> I'm a physician, skilled in the use of drugs such as no one, doubtless, knows, not even Paeon who lives on Olympus, physician to the gods.
>
> (Transl. Perry)

The meaning of the phrase *in arce deos* should therefore be "the gods in heaven". In Latin, *arx*, when used in this sense, is almost invariably accompanied by *caeli* or the genitive of a word of similar meaning (in Avian. 22.2 we find *ab arce poli*), but, as Shackleton Bailey pointed out, in Dracontius, *De laudibus dei*, 2.557 (*dexter in arce sedens*), *in arce* alone, without any genitive, means *in arce caeli*.

With all due respect to Shackleton Bailey, I believe that the transmitted clausula *in orbe deos* is sound. The intertextual analysis warrants it. Avianus clearly had in mind a famous pericope, *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, which constitutes the first four feet of two hexameters, one by Petronius (*fr*. 28.1 Müller), the other by Statius (*Theb*. 3.661).[17] In both Petronius' and Statius' passages *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* means "fear first made gods in the universe".[18] This hypotext, as far as I know, has escaped all commentators of the fables by Avianus.

What, then, does *in orbe* mean in our line of Avianus? Gaide, who in her aforementioned edition of the fabulist retains *in orbe* (without citing Petronius and Statius), translates it as "in the sky".[19] But, as Withof remarked, there is virtually no passage in which *orbis* alone unambiguously means "sky".[20] *orbis* can unambiguously mean "sky" only when linked to a genitive (*orbis caeli*) or an adjective such as *purus*, as in Ov. *Am*. 1.8.10 *puro fulget in orbe dies* ("day shines in the clear sky"), or *sidereus*, as in Manil. 1.279–282 *axis* […] | […], | *sidereus circa medium quem uoluitur orbis* |

16 Withof 1741, 241.

17 On the relative chronology of these two hexameters and on the priority of the Petronian one, see Zago 2021b, 289–293.

18 That is, "fear first made men believe that there are gods in the universe" — a Democritean and Epicurean motif; see Zago 2021b, 293 n. 3.

19 Gaide 1980, 84.

20 Withof 1741, 241.

aetheriosque rotat cursus ("the axis [...] forms the middle about which the starry sphere revolves and wheels its heavenly flight").[21] Therefore, in Avianus' line I suggest translating *in orbe* as "in the universe". The couplet *nec se Paeonio iactat cessisse magistro*, | *quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos* means, according to my interpretation, "her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master, though he heals the gods, who are eternal in the universe".[22] This translation, of course, is strongly supported by Avianus' hypotext, which is, as we have just seen, the pericope *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, found in both Petronius and Statius. With regard to the technique of imitation, here we have a typical case of *oppositio in imitando*, that is, an 'emulative' allusion that involves an alteration or inversion of the sense of the hypotext and appeals to the readers' literary memory (only if the readers realize that *in orbe deos* is borrowed from the pericope *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* are they able to appreciate Avianus' intertextual play: the pericope used by Petronius and Statius states that gods do not exist in the universe, whereas Avianus represents them as "eternal in the universe").[23]

The second passage I want to discuss is Avian. 35.1–4:

> Fama est quod geminum profundens simia partum
> diuidat in uarias pignora nata uices.
> Namque unum caro genetrix educit amore,
> alterius **odiis exsaturata** tumet.
> (Avian. 35.1–4)

> The story goes that a monkey gave birth to twin offspring and assigned her children each to a different destiny. One the mother reared in fond affection, and she rankled with superabundant hatred for the other.
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

21 Transl. Goold 1977.

22 From a syntactical point of view, it would also be possible to link *in orbe* to *curet*, not to *perpetuos*, and therefore translate *quamuis* [...] *deos* as "though he heals throughout the universe the everlasting gods". But according to the literary tradition, Paeon heals the gods on Olympus, not throughout the universe. In fact, in Hom. *Il.* 5.395–402; 868; 899–904 Hades and Ares, wounded respectively by Heracles at Pylos and by Diomedes at Troy, rush to Olympus to be cured by Paeon (Babr. 120.5–6 clearly alludes, in my opinion, to these passages in the *Iliad*). For the same reason I do not think that *quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos* can here mean something like καὶ εἰ ἀϊδίους θεοὺς ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ἰατρεύει ("though he heals on the land surface of the world the eternal gods"; for *orbis* in the sense of *oikoumene*, see ThlL s.v. *orbis*, 915.23–33; OLD s. eadem v., 12). It is true that the two gods healed by Paeon are injured by men, according to Homer, in two different places in the *oikoumene*, but, as already noted, in order to be cured they must go up to Olympus, where Paeon lives and practises his craft.

23 On *oppositio in imitando* in Late Antique poetry, cf. Pelttari 2014, 154–160.

Shackleton Bailey observes: "*exsaturata* […] is clearly wrong; the original is perhaps more likely to have been *exstimulata*; cf. Livy 42.29.2 *Eumenen cum uetus odium stimulabat tum recens ira*".[24]

I do not believe that Shackleton Bailey was right in deeming the text corrupt. Let us consider Juno's speech in book 7 of the *Aeneid*:

> Num Sigeis occumbere campis,
> num capti potuere capi? Num incensa cremauit
> Troia uiros? Medias acies mediosque per ignis
> inuenere uiam. At, credo, mea numina tandem
> fessa iacent, **odiis** aut **exsaturata** quieui.
> Quin etiam patria excussos infesta per undas
> ausa sequi et profugis toto me opponere ponto.
> (Verg. *Aen.* 7.294–300)

> Could they not have died on the plains of Sigeum? Nor, when taken, have truly been taken? When Troy was fired, could she not have consumed those men? Through the midst of the Greek lines, through the midst of the flames, they have found a way. It is hardly, I suppose, that at last my power lies exhausted, or that sated on hate I have rested. Yes, I even flung them out of their homeland and ventured to pursue them with enmity over the waves; in the refugees' path I stood, right across the sea.
>
> (Transl. Horsfall)

Line 298 in the passage of Vergil (*odiis aut exsaturata quieui*) reveals that *exsaturata* is what Avianus wrote. Avianus clearly had this line of Vergil in mind. Shackleton Bailey, who did not take Vergil's line into account, altered the transmitted *exsaturata* to *exstimulata* ("stimulated"), because he evidently believed that a *simia* who is *odiis exsaturata* ("sated on hate") can no longer hate. This is also the sense of Vergil's phrase *odiis* […] *exsaturata quieui*. But here we have another case of *oppositio in imitando*, because Avianus seems to have altered the original meaning of the phrase in the *Aeneid* and followed a different line of reasoning from Vergil's: if the *simia* is sated on hate (*odiis exsaturata*), then she is full of hate and is therefore swollen with hate (*odiis tumet*). In this line by Avianus we find a pleonastic use of the past participle (*exsaturata tumet* in this context is equal to *tumet*) that is not unknown in Latin poetry: see Prop. 2.24b.47 *dura est quae multis simulatum fingit amorem* ("she is unfeeling who feigns a pretend love to many", that is, "she is unfeeling who feigns love to many"); Sil. *Pun.* 9.586 *ferens* […] *portat* ("brings […] by carrying"). In the passage of Avianus, as in those of Propertius and Silius, the finite verb (in Avianus *tumet*, in Propertius *fingit*, in Silius *portat*) is, as it were, explained

24 Shackleton Bailey 1978, 300.

by a predicative participle of similar meaning (in Avianus *exsaturata*, in Propertius *simulatum*, in Silius *ferens*).[25]

In these two passages, intertextual analysis has induced me to defend the transmitted text. In other passages, however, it can lead in a different direction.

2.2 Intertextuality as a tool for emending corrupt readings

In several passages intertextuality is the key to healing corrupt readings transmitted by manuscripts. In some cases, the hypotexts that inspire emendations are the Aesopic fables from which the poems of Avianus (*qua* fables) are derived. See, for instance, Avian. 34.5–12:

> Solibus ereptos hiemi formica labores
> distulit et breuibus condidit ante cauis;
> uerum ubi candentes suscepit terra pruinas
> aruaque sub rigido delituere gelu,
> pigra nimis tanto non aequans corpore nimbos,[26]
> in propriis laribus umida grana legit.
> decolor hanc precibus supplex alimenta rogabat,
> quae quondam querulo ruperat arua sono.
> (Avian. 34.5–12)

> An ant reserved for the winter the fruits of toil snatched during sunny hours and stored them betimes in her tiny hole. But when earth assumed its white robe of hoar frost and fields lay hid beneath unyielding ice, then, quite idle and unfit bodily to face the winter weather, she picked out the moistened grain in her own abode. Pale, a cicada who before had cleft the fields with plaintive note, amid prayers and supplications begged the ant for food.
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

I have quoted the transmitted text, which is hardly acceptable, since it seems to imply that the ants' only activity during the cold season is to pick out the moistened grain stored in their nest, without ever going outside, but performing this task

25 To quote the *ipsissima uerba* of Hofmann and Szantyr, who cite Propertius and Silius but not Avianus, passages such as these contain "eine pleonastische Erläuterung des *Verbum finitum* durch ein synonymes prädikatives Partizip" ("a pleonastic explanation of the finite verb by means of a synonymous predicative participle"): see Hofmann/Szantyr 1972, 797, § 39 c β.

26 In this line *nimis* means, as often in late Latin, *ualde*; as for *tanto* […] *corpore*, it would mean, according to many scholars, "such a small body" (cf. the notes *ad locum* of Ellis 1887 and Gaide 1980); *nimbos* is metonymically used in the sense of "cold and stormy weather", that is, "winter weather" (cf. Gaide 1980, *ad loc.*).

entirely within it.[27] According to Ellis,[28] the ant would pick out the moistened grain in order to consume it *in propriis laribus*. However, the main source of Avian. 34, namely a fable by Babrius, explicitly states that ants do not eat moistened grain but drag it out of their hole to air and dry it. Let us consider, in fact, Babrius:

> Χειμῶνος ὥρῃ σῖτον ἐκ μυχοῦ σύρων
> ἔψυχε μύρμηξ, ὃν θέρους σεσωρεύκει.
> (Babr. 140.1–2)

> An ant in the winter-time was dragging out of his hole some grain which he had stored up in the summer, in order to air it.
>
> (Transl. Perry)

See also the following anonymous version of the same story in Byzantine dodecasyllabic verse:

> Ὥρας δέ ποτε χειμῶνος τυγχανούσης,
> μύρμηκες σῖτον ἡλίαζον βραχέντα.
> Τέττιξ δὲ τούτους οὕτως ἰδὼν ποιοῦντας,
> αὐτὸς λιμώττων καὶ μέλλων τεθνηκέναι,
> δραμὼν παρ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἐδωδὴν ἐπεζήτει. 5
> (Aesop. 336.1–5 Ch.)

> Winter had arrived, and the ants were drying the moistened grain in the sun. A cicada saw them doing this, and being hungry and destined to die, approached them and sought food.
>
> (Transl. G.Z.)

See also a passage from Pliny the Elder:

> Semina adrosa condunt, ne rursus in frugem exeant e terra, maiora ad introitum diuidunt, madefacta imbre proferunt atque siccant.
>
> (Plin. *HN* 11.109)

27 Of course, picking out *humida grana* that are inside a nest does not *per se* imply that these *grana* are subsequently carried outside it. In Sen. *Ben*. 5.24.3 *ad Mundam in acie oculus mihi effossus est et in capite lecta ossa* ("in the battle of Munda I lost an eye and some bone splinters from my skull") and Quint. *Inst*. 8.5.21 *cum lecta in capite cuiusdam ossa* […] *matri dedisset* ("after giving bone splinters from someone's skull to that person's mother") the phrase *in capite legere ossa* does not mean "to take bone splinters *from* the (wounded) skull", but literally "to take bone splinters that are inside the (wounded) skull".

28 Ellis 1887, *ad loc*.

> (the ants) nibble their seeds before they store them away, so that they may not sprout up again out of the earth and germinate; they divide the larger seeds so as to get them in; when the seeds have been wetted by rain they bring them out and dry them.
>
> (Transl. Rackham)

In the light of these passages, I suggest

> pigra nimis tantum,[29] non aequans corpore nimbos,[30]
> e[31] propriis laribus umida grana legit.
>
> Quite idle and unfit bodily to face the winter weather, she merely [*tantum*] pulls the moistened grain out of her hole.
>
> (Transl. G.Z.)

If my conjecture (proposed here for the first time)[32] hits the mark, Avianus would be saying that during the winter the ant's only effort is to lazily drag the moistened grain out of its nest (a statement which would be perfectly in line with what Babrius, the anonymous Byzantine fabulist, and Pliny say), and the dialogue between the ant and the cicada in Avianus' version of the fable would have the same setting as in the versions by Babrius and the anonymous Byzantine fabulist, namely the space outside the ant's nest.

In other passages, the hypotexts that prompt emendations of Avianus' *paradosis* are not fables but texts in different genres. In the manuscripts, Avian. 3.5–6 reads as follows:

> Ne tibi transuerso placeant haec deuia, nate,
> rursus in obliquos neu uelis ire pedes.
> (Avian. 3.5–6)

This text cannot be retained, because *in obliquos* […] *ire pedes* is not tolerable Latin. In a recent article[33] I proposed

29 *tantum* ego : *tanto* **ω**.

30 The punctuation is mine.

31 *e* ego : *in* **ω** (possis etiam *a*). I assume that *legit*, which is warranted by Verg. *G*. 1.373 *umida uela legit* ("furls the soaking sails"), is here used in the sense of "pulls out" (or "gathers by pulling out"): cf. *Epic. Drusi* 223–224 *crinem* […] *legit ab ore* ("he pulled his hair out of his face"); Stat. *Theb*. 11.311–312 (*serpens*) *e corpore toto* | *uirus in ora legit* ("a snake from its whole body gathers the venom into its mouth"); see OLD s.v. *lego*, 1–3.

32 I have proposed many other conjectures in a set of *aduersaria* that has recently appeared (Zago 2025); see also Zago 2023.

33 Zago 2023.

Ne tibi transuerso placeant haec deuia, nate,
rursus **in obliquum** neu uelis ire **pedes**.

Don't go sideways and choose these crooked ways, my child,[34] and don't seek to walk backwards and slantwise.

(Transl. G.Z.)

I take *pedes* as the nominative singular of *pedes*, *peditis*, used predicatively (*eo pedes* = "I go on foot", that is, "I walk" — a Vergilian idiom: cf. *Aen*. 6.880, 7.624, 10.453; see ThlL s.v. *pedes*, 968.44-49); *in obliquum* is an adverbial phrase and means "slantwise".[35]

I regard my proposal (*in obliquum* […] *pedes*) as superior to that of Baehrens (*in obliquo* […] *pedes*) and to that of Schenkl (*in obliquum* […] *pede*),[36] as it is supported by Augustan parallels, namely Verg. *G*. 1.97–99 *et qui, proscisso quae suscitat aequore terga,* | ***rursus in obliquum*** *uerso perrumpit aratro* | *exercetque frequens tellurem atque imperat aruis* ("he […] who, having raised flat land into ridges by ploughing one way, ploughs it crosswise for a second time, and regularly works his lands and keeps a tight rein on his holding")[37] and Prop. 2.12.22–24 *quis erit qui* […] *canat ut soleant molliter* ***ire pedes?*** ("who will there […] be to sing how softly her feet are accustomed to move?").[38]

Note that in Vergil *rursus* means *iterum*,[39] whereas in Avianus it means *retro* (cf. Avian. 3.1 *curua retrocedens dum fert uestigia cancer* ["while a crab was walking backwards and tracing its crooked way"], which is picked up here), and that in Propertius *pedes* is the accusative plural of *pes*, *pedis*, while in Avianus' line, as we have seen, it is the nominative singular of *pedes*. In 3.5–6, as in 6.7–8, 35.1–4 (see *supra*) and other passages, Avianus borrows phrases and words from his hypotexts, but uses them with meanings that are different from those they have in their original contexts. Being aware of this typical feature of Avianus' style can often help us to better understand what he actually wrote and what he meant.

34 The mother crab is speaking to her baby.

35 In the light of Avian. 23.10, *siue decus busti seu uelis esse deum* ("whether you wish me to adorn a tomb or to be a god"), one could also interpret *pedes* as the accusative plural of *pes*, *pedis* (in this case, *in obliquum* […] *pedes* would mean "do not let your feet go slantwise"), but if we take it with *ire* as the nominative singular of *pedes*, *peditis*, we obtain a text that is more idiomatic and, so to speak, more Vergilian. Therefore, my preference is clear.

36 Baehrens 1883, *ad loc.*; Schenkl 1865, 401.

37 Transl. Fallon.

38 Transl. G.Z.

39 See Thomas 1988, *ad loc*.

3 Conclusion

Avianus' fables, *qua* fables, derive from Aesopic sources (*in primis* Babrius' mythiambi), but his poetic *parole* is modelled on the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages, Vergil being by far Avianus' favourite poet. Therefore, detecting the countless 'emulative' and 'nonreferential' allusions to non-Aesopic passages in Avianus' lines is an indispensable tool for correctly interpreting his text and, if necessary, improving it by emendation.

Interestingly enough, Avianus, who writes fables in elegiac couplets and begins his Aesopic book with a fable that plays with elegiac motifs (the *paraclausithyron*; the quarrels between lovers),[40] in the other fables does not employ Latin elegy as one of his primary poetic models, but only as a repository of verbal *iuncturae* such as *ire pedes*, which, as we have seen (§ 2.2), he borrows from Propertius (2.12.24) only to use it in his third fable with a meaning that is different from that which it has in its original context. In the fables of Avianus, elegiac is the metre, but not the style, which is distinctly Vergilian, nor the contents, which are Aesopic. Avianus' fables are, as it were, elegiac poems without elegy — not an insignificant feature of a βιβλίον that is characterized by intersections of genres.

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40 See Gärtner 2022, 47–54.

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Christopher Poms

Peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens: Avianus' Fables and Roman Love Elegy

Abstract: Despite a longstanding negative assessment, many of the intertextual references in Avianus' fables turn out to be highly elaborate instances of intertextuality, which opens them up to more differentiated interpretation. A prime example of this is the intertextual connection between the first two fables of Avianus' collection and Roman love elegy, which this paper analyses. A short introduction on intertextuality in Avianus' fables is followed by an analysis of the first two fables and their references to love elegy, which prompts suggestions about possible effects on the fable's interpretation. The following comparative analysis of the two fables presents a multi-layered connection between these fables and the genre of Roman love elegy. Against the background of the paratextual *epistula*, it is then demonstrated how this connection facilitates metapoetic readings of the two fables and their messages. A summary of the findings and the outlook for future investigations conclude the paper.

Throughout modern research, the fables of Avianus, which are usually dated around 400 CE, have been rated quite negatively. In this regard, Avianus' collection can surely be considered a 'child of its time', since these negative assessments target stylistic peculiarities that we today associate strongly with literature of the Late Antique period. One of the main points of criticism is the use of intertextual references: throughout the corpus we stumble upon an abundant number of blatant and sometimes allegedly awkward references to poets of the Classical period. While this is by no means unusual in the context of Late Antique literary aesthetics, which include among their main features a deeply reverent attitude to the 'Classical giants' and (visible) references to them,[1] one can easily see how this might differ from the aesthetic ideals of other periods and so give rise to such negative assessments. Upon closer inspection, however, many of these references in Avianus' fables prove to be highly elaborate instances of intertextuality, often adding multiple layers to the text and opening it up to a more nuanced interpretation. A clear and impressive example of this can be found in the first two fables of the collection, where an

1 On the reverent Late Antique interaction with Latin literature of the Classical period, and on intertextual references as one of its main features, see e.g. Pelttari 2014, *passim*.

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intertextual connection to Roman love elegy is established through a plethora of references in motifs and lexicon.

In what follows, a short introduction will provide necessary preliminaries for the investigation (1), and I will then analyse the first two fables of Avianus' collection, examining where intertextual references to love elegy are found, how they are implemented, and to what extent they influence the fables and their (possible) interpretation (2.1–2). I will also consider the two fables side by side, to elucidate the role that these references play in the reciprocal context of the two poems (2.3). In a third section, I consider the larger context and show, against the background of the paratextual *epistula*, how the two fables' multi-layered connection to love elegy affects the interpretation of Avianus' whole collection, by facilitating meta-poetic readings of them and their messages, which can be seen as relating to the author's literary ambition (3). A conclusion offers a summary of the findings and the outlook for potential further investigations of these themes (4).

1 Introduction: models, changes, and intertextuality in the fables of Avianus

Intertextuality is — to some degree — always a question of models. In this respect, the fables of Avianus hold a unique position that sets them apart from other fable collections: there is no doubt that the *Mythiambi* of Babrius were the model on which Avianus devised his collection.[2] On the one hand, the author explicitly mentions Babrius in the *epistula,*[3] on the other hand, direct connections to Babrius' *Mythiambi* and their prose paraphrases can be established for 35 of the 42 fables of Avianus.[4] There has, however, been some discussion about whether Avianus knew the *Mythiambi* of Babrius directly, that is, in their original metrical Greek form, or only through a Latin prose paraphrase, presumably that of a certain Titianus,

2 Cf. e.g. Küppers 1977, 163: "Es ist allgemein unumstritten, daß die avianischen Fabeln stofflich im wesentlichen auf Babrius zurückgehen." ("It is undisputed that in terms of content the fables of Avianus go back to Babrius."); also Crusius 1896, 2376: "Die von Avian behandelten Stoffe finden sich also, wie schon Lachmann und Eberhard sahen, ausschließlich bei Babrius und in den von Babrius abhängigen Überlieferungen." ("The topics treated by Avianus are thus, as already Lachmann and Eberhard recognized, found exclusively in Babrius and the traditions dependent on him.").

3 Cf. Avian. *praef.* 13–14; also, below § 3.

4 Cf. Küppers 1977, 164; Luzzato/LaPenna 1986, XIX–XXII; Adrados 2000, 253–273.

which is mentioned in one of Ausonius' letters.[5] While this is not the place to discuss this debate in detail, there are several good reasons to assume that Avianus accessed the fables of Babrius in their original form.[6] One of these is that one of the originally defining features of Latin literature, to translate Greek models into Latin, while trying to improve and ultimately surpass them in the spirit of *aemulatio* again gained special attention from the fourth century onward.[7] Avianus' adaptation of the Babrian fables clearly is to be seen in the context of this '*a Graecis in Latinas*' practice.[8] Hence, when reading and interpreting Avianus, we must always consider the fable versions of Babrius as well.

There is not a single fable of Avianus in which there are no changes from the corresponding Babrian version[9] in content and/or structure, and this often goes hand in hand with changes in the fables' motifs and messages.[10] It is especially in the context of such deviations from the Babrian versions that intertextual references can be found. As already touched on, these references focus strongly on the 'great' poets of the Classical period, most prominently Vergil, Ovid, and Horace.[11] In the early 2000s, Roberto Scanzo performed a great service for research on Avianus by identifying and collecting these references on a large scale.[12] Scanzo focused on identifying them by considering lexical and prosodic similarities, in most cases, however, there is more to the intertextual references in Avianus than what meets the recipient's eye on the surface level. This should be borne in mind as we now analyse the first two fables and their references to love elegy, which are prime examples of how intertextuality is used in Avianus' collection.

5 Auson. *Ep.* 9b.78–81 (according to Green 1999).

6 The debate centres on the phrase *rudi latinitate compositas* (Avian. *praef.* 15–17) and what it refers to. Advocates of the assumption that Avianus knew the *Mythiambi* only through a prose paraphrase read this statement as describing the prose paraphrase, he alledgedly used (cf. e.g. Crusius 1896, 2374; Gaide 1980, 38–43). In my opinion it is far more plausible that this phrase refers to Avianus' own collection, thus presenting a prime example of a topos of modesty through self-deprecation in the context of a *captatio benevolentiae*. For this stance, see Ellis 1887, 51; Küppers 1977, 163–191; Holzberg 2012, 71–72; 2019, 41; 2022, 10–12.

7 Cf. e.g. the three extant works of Rufius Festus Avienus (4th century), all of which go back to Greek models, cf. Küppers 1977, 198–199. For an account of the discussion regarding this topic, see Küppers 1977, 193–207.

8 Cf. below § 3.

9 If there is a Babrian version extant.

10 For the narratological and structural peculiarities of Avianus' fables — also in comparison to their Babrian models —, see Küppers 1977, *passim*.

11 There is, e.g. not a single fable without any reference to one of Vergil's works, although most of them involve the *Aeneid*.

12 Cf. Scanzo 2001a; 2001b; 2002, *passim*.

2 Identifying and analysing references to love elegy in Avian. 1 and 2

2.1 Avian. 1 — *de nutrice et infante*

Rustica deflentem paruum iurauerat olim,
ni taceat, rabido quod foret esca lupo.
credulus hanc uocem lupus audiit et manet ipsas
peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens.
nam lassata puer nimiae dat membra quieti,
spem quoque raptori sustulit inde fames.
hunc ubi siluarum repetentem lustra suarum
ieiunum coniunx sensit adesse lupa:
"cur, inquit, nullam referens de more rapinam,
languida consumptis sed trahis ora genis?"
"ne mireris, ait, deceptum fraude maligna
uix miserum uacua delituisse fuga.
nam quae praeda, rogas, quae spes contingere posset,
iurgia nutricis cum mihi uerba darent?"
haec sibi dicta putet seque hac sciat arte notari,
femineam quisquis credidit esse fidem.[13]

(Avian. 1)

A peasant woman had once sworn to a crying boy that if he did not keep quiet he would become food for the raging wolf. Gullibly the wolf heard this speech and stayed awake right in front of the door, nursing vain desires. For the boy surrenders his exhausted limbs to the overpowering calm; then hunger also took away the robber's hope. As soon as his wife, the she-wolf, noticed that he was hungrily returning to the lairs of his woods, she said: "Why don't you bring prey as you should, but make a long face with sunken cheeks?" "Marvel not," he said, "that, deceived by malicious fraud, I have had difficulty in vain flight. For what prey, you ask, what hope could I have, since the wicked words of the nurse deceived me?"
Everyone has to believe that this is said for them, and to know that they are designated by this art, who believes that there is female reliability.[14]

(Transl. Chr.P.)

Ursula Gärtner has convincingly shown that this fable reflects on, and to some degree deconstructs, the genre of fable poetry.[15] On the one hand, the naïve and

13 All texts follow the edition of Guaglianone 1958.

14 If not stated otherwise, all translations are my own. This translation is oriented towards that of Gärtner 2022, 46.

15 See Gärtner 2022, 41–50.

henpecked wolf does not match his typical character in fable.[16] On the other, there is also a witty play with the issue of *ueritas* and *falsitas*. This issue is central to the genre of fable poetry and is commonly raised not only in prologues to fable collections but also in definitions of the fable genre, where it comprises two aspects, of truth and falsehood, and the reality and fictionality of fables.[17] This dichotomy is also important when examining the connection to love elegy.

The model for this fable is Babr. 16.[18] When comparing Avianus' adaptation to the Babrian version, the parallel construction of their first eight verses is striking: in both fables, the first line describes the setting, where both have the rustic nurse (*rustica* – ἄγροικος) as the first word, while the second line contains her threat to the crying child.[19] In line 3 the wolf is introduced, who hears (*audiit* – ἀκούσας) this threat, believes it (*credulus* – ἀληθεύειν νομίσας, 3–4), and therefore waits (*manet*, 3 – ἔμεινεν, 4) for its fulfilment. In the fifth line the boy falls asleep (*dat membra quieti* – ἐκοιμήθη), leading to the wolf's realization that his hopes are in vain (*spem sustulit*, 6 – νωθραῖς ἐλπίσιν παρεδρεύσας, 7), while line 6 focuses on the animal's hunger (*fames* – πεινῶν), and line 7 tells us how it ultimately leaves (*repetentem lustra* – ἀπῆλθε). After the wolf returns home, the she-wolf (*lupa* – λύκαινα), its mate (*coniunx* – σύνευνος), is introduced in line 8.

Then the two versions begin to diverge: although there are similar dialogues between the wolves in both, in Babrius this 'dispute' only comprises two lines, while in Avianus it is much extended, spanning six lines. While a general statement about

16 Cf. e.g. Phaed. 1.1 Z. [= G.].

17 Cf. e.g. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 7 Z. [= G.]; Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19; Theon *Prog.* 4 (72, 78 Spengel); August. *Soliloq.* 2.11.19 etc. On the discussion of *falsitas* and *ueritas*, cf. also Cameron 1967; Küppers 1977, 173–174; Uden 2009, 113–115; Feddern 2018, *passim*.

18 Babr. 16: Ἄγροικος ἠπείλησε νηπίῳ τίτθη κλαίοντι· | "παῦσαι, μή σε τῷ λύκῳ ῥίψω." | λύκος δ' ἀκούσας τήν τε γραῦν ἀληθεύειν | νομίσας ἔμεινεν ὡς ἕτοιμα δειπνήσων, | ἕως ὁ παῖς μὲν ἐσπέρης ἐκοιμήθη, | αὐτὸς δὲ πεινῶν καὶ λύκος χανὼν ὄντως | ἀπῆλθε νωθραῖς ἐλπίσιν παρεδρεύσας. | λύκαινα δ' αὐτὸν ἡ σύνευνος ἠρώτα· | "πῶς οὐδὲν ἄρας ἦλθες, ὡς πρὶν εἰώθης;" | ὁ δ' εἶπε· "πῶς γάρ, ὃς γυναικὶ πιστεύω;" ("A rustic nurse threatened a small child, when it was crying: 'Stop it, lest I feed you to the wolf.' The wolf, hearing this and believing the old woman was telling the truth, stayed looking forward to a ready meal, until the child fell asleep in the evening, while he himself left, hungry and a 'wolf with gaping jaw', after he leaned on vain hopes. The she-wolf, his mate, asked him: 'Why did you come, without bringing something like usually before?' And he said: 'Why indeed, I, who believe a woman?'"). This translation is that of Holzberg 2019, 67. On the relation of Babr. 16 to Avian. 1, see also Spielhofer 2023, 281–282.

19 The fact that Avianus uses *oratio obliqua* here rather than *oratio recta* like Babrius is connected to his peculiarities in style and narrative. Avianus in general makes far less use of direct speech than his model and uses it specifically to emphasize certain (parts of) speeches. On this, see Küppers 1977, 88–95; Schmalzgruber 2020, 105–114; Poms 2022, 250–253.

female credibility is advanced by the wolf in Babrius (10), in Avianus the wolf narrates what happened to him (11–14). It is only after these four lines that we get an epimythium, in which female credibility as a whole is questioned. Gärtner has already identified this 'marital quarrel' of the wolves as a possible reference to love elegy, in which quarrels between lovers are a common topic, and she has suggested Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33–38 as a possible sub- or intertext.[20]

An even more obvious reference to love elegy can be found in line 4 of Avianus: as has been pointed out, both versions explicitly mention that, after hearing the nurse's words, the wolf stayed — *manet* in line 3 of Avianus is a literal equivalent of ἔμεινεν in Babrius line 4. However, in Avianus line 4 we are given additional information about the waiting wolf: *peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens* ("[he] stayed awake in front of the door, nursing vain desires"). This clearly takes up the motif of the *exclusus amator*, with whom the wolf is thereby identified. Thus, by adding the detail of the *fores*, in front of which the wolf waits, Avianus nonchalantly calls up a well-known motif, enriching the possible interpretation of the text. It is also significant that this takes place in the fourth line, where Avianus' adaptation is otherwise still very similar to the model. This draws special attention to this small but meaningful change, presenting a prime example of how intertextuality functions in Avianus.[21]

The motif of the *exclusus amator* in conjunction with the extension of the plot in lines 9–14, which particularly emphasizes the wolves' 'marital dispute', therefore seems to establish an intertextual connection between this fable and love elegy on a motivic level.[22] In light of this, the central motifs of this fable, *spes* and *fides*, can also be seen as intertextually charged hints towards love elegy, where the *spes* of the *amator* and the *fides* of the *puella* are among the main topics. Of course, we now

20 Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33–38: *cum bene uir traxit uultum rugasque coegit, | quod uoluit fieri blanda puella, facit | sed tamen interdum tecum quoque iurgia nectat, | et simulet lacrimas carnificemque uocet. | tu contra obiciens, quae tuto diluat illa, | et ueris falso crimine deme fidem.* ("After the good husband lours and frowns, he does what the flattering girl wants to happen. But, nevertheless, she may start quarrels with you, and feign tears and call you a bastard. You, on the other hand, accuse her of things that she can safely rebut, and take away the credibility of truth through <the accusation of> a false crime."). — I find this very convincing, since there are also possible lexical parallels, e.g.: *trahis languida ora* (Avian. 1.10) and *uir traxit uultum* (Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33). Cf. Gärtner 2022, 47, esp. also n. 20.

21 Although Avianus usually uses lexical references (cf. above § 1, esp. n. 1; 11–12), I would argue that a motif this prominent does not need a lexical model to be immediately recognized.

22 Also, there seem to be quite a few references through motifs to Tib. 1.1 in particular, which I only mention, since they cannot be discussed here; they will be treated in detail in my PhD project.

need to ask how this connection to love elegy affects or interacts with the interpretation of the fable.

The central subject of Avian. 1 is undoubtedly the question of *ueritas* and *falsitas*, comprising two aspects, the first being the credibility of women, which is the topic of the Babrian version. This is interconnected with the second aspect, the question of the *ueritas* and *falsitas* of fables, which is central to the fable genre and is also posed prominently at the beginning of other fable collections.[23] Not only is this fable subject inherently connected to credibility, but the *iurgia* of the *rustica nutrix* and the wolf, which is not a typical fable wolf, pick up and reflect upon the fable genre and its central dichotomy.[24] The choice of this fable topic, as well as its positioning at the beginning of the collection, therefore, seems to pay tribute to tradition and to enter into a dialogue with it in a sophisticated way.

However, if we take love elegy into consideration, it is noteworthy that the fidelity and truthfulness (of the *puellae*) are among its central and recurring themes, which sheds new light on the *iurgia* of the *rustica nutrix*: they are heard by two males, the wolf and the *deflens puer*, who receive them very differently. The wolf, the *exclusus amator*, is *credulus* in respect to the woman's words and full of *spes*. It is only after his long wait *ante fores* that he gets disillusioned and realizes that there is no *fides feminea.* Because of his disillusionment, he repays the other female in the fable, the *lupa* — the term is of course ambiguous –, in the same way when she scolds him: he lies to her (12). The boy, on the other hand, at no point believes the *rustica,* but falls asleep from exhaustion, as the *lassata membra* (5) suggest. He is already disillusioned about female credibility, it would seem. In light of this, the boy and the wolf seem to embody two different stages of the *amator*: one where he is desperate and heavily lamenting, knowing that there is no female fidelity; and one where he is hopeful and gullible and ready to endure the challenges imposed on him by the *puella*. However, the true significance of this connection to love elegy only becomes apparent if we also consider the following fable, where it continues, as does the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas*.

2.2 Avian. 2 — *de testudine et aquila*

Pennatis auibus quondam testudo locuta est:
si quis eam uolucrum constituisset humi,
protinus e rubris conchas proferret arenis,
quis pretium nitido cortice baca daret;

23 Cf. above n. 17.

24 Cf. Gärtner 2022 as above in n. 15.

indignum sibimet, tardo quod sedula gressu
nil ageret toto perficeretque die.
ast ubi promissis aquilam fallacibus implet,
experta est similem perfida lingua fidem.
et male mercatis dum quaerit sidera pennis,
occidit infelix alitis ungue fero.
tum quoque sublimis, cum iam moreretur, in auras
ingemuit uotis haec licuisse suis.
nam dedit exosae post haec documenta quietis
non sine supremo magna labore peti.
sic quicumque noua sublatus laude tumescit,15
dat merito poenas, dum meliora cupit.
(Avian. 2)[25]

To the feathered birds the turtle once spoke: If one of the winged had <after a flight through air> set it <safe> on ground, immediately it would bring forth shells from the Red Sands <= Sea>, which pearls with shining skin would give value; disgraceful <it seemed> to itself that, <though> eager, with slow step it did and completed nothing the whole day. But as it had filled the eagle with deceitful promises, the disloyal tongue experienced similar loyalty. And while it chased the stars on ill-bought wings, the unlucky one died by the fierce talon of the bird. Then also, high above, in the agony of death, to the heavens it moaned that it suffered this <punishment> for its desire. For thenceforward it gave testimony to the hated tardiness not to strive for great things without utmost toil. Thus, whoever swells, elevated by new praise, rightly gets punished while he strives for better things.

(Transl. Chr.P.)

The continuation of the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas* in this fable is connected to a change in its motifs relative to the Babrian model, Babr. 115.[26] In Babrius' version the turtle is primarily characterized by its naivety: on the one hand, it wishes for something unrealistic (to fly), on the other hand, it blindly trusts the eagle with its

25 For the following analysis of Avian. 2, cf. Poms 2024, 104–107.

26 Babr. 115: Νωθὴς χελώνη λιμνάσιν ποτ' αἰθυίαις | λάροις τε καὶ κήυξιν εἶπεν ἀγρώσταις· | "κἀμὲ πτερωτὴν εἴθε τις πεποιήκει." | τῇ δ' ἐκ τύχης ἔλεξεν αἰετὸς ταῦτα· | "πόσον, χέλυμνα, μισθὸν αἰετῷ δώσεις, | ὅστις σ' ἐλαφρὴν καὶ μετάρσιον θήσω;" | "τὰ τῆς Ἐρυθρῆς πάντα δῶρά σοι δώσω." | "τοιγὰρ διδάξω" φησίν. ὑπτίην δ' ἄρας | ἔκρυψε νέφεσιν, ἔνθεν εἰς ὄρος ῥίψας | ἤραξεν αὐτῆς οὖλον ὄστρακον νώτων. | ἡ δ' εἶπεν ἐκψύχουσα· "σὺν δίκῃ θνήσκω· | τί γὰρ νεφῶν μοι καὶ τίς ἦν πτερῶν χρείη | τῇ καὶ χαμᾶζε δυσκόλως προβαινούσῃ;" ("The lazy turtle once said to the loons in the swamp, the seagulls and the wild sea swallows: 'If only someone made me winged!' To it the eagle said this by chance: 'What prize, turtle, will you give to me, the eagle, I who will lightly lift you in the air?' 'All gifts of the Red Sea I will give to you.' 'Hence, I will teach you', he said. Then <the eagle> lifted <the turtle> turned on its back, hid it in the clouds, from there threw it on a mountain and broke the shell of its back. It said exhaling its soul: 'Rightly I die. Why did I need clouds, why wings, who <only> slowly went forward on the ground?'"). This translation is that of Holzberg 2019, 165, the additions in angled brackets are mine.

life. Küppers argues that, besides this obvious naivety, the greed motivating the turtle's wish should also be seen as the cause of its demise, as the eagle acts on the turtle's plea to exploit it.[27]

In stark contrast, the eagle in Avianus disappears into the background, while the turtle becomes the sole actor. Even while being killed by the eagle (10), the turtle remains the grammatical subject through the sentence's passive construction. Further, the turtle's character has changed notably: despite obviously still being portrayed as naïve in Avianus for gullibly trusting the eagle, the turtle's main character trait seems to be its deceitfulness, for it does not intend to pay the prize (7–8) that it has promised for fulfilment of its wish (3). Also, compared to the Babrian version, the motif of greed seems more prominent in Avianus' adaptation, where it is also transferred to the birds, whose greed the turtle seeks to arouse with its promise. This brings about a change in the fable's message: whereas in Babrius the dying turtle laments its foolish wish for things not apt for it, in Avian. 2 we are presented with two concluding sentences (13–16), each spanning one distich, that condemn dishonest means of achieving one's goals. The core of this message is explicitly verbalized in line 14: *non sine supremo magna labore peti.*

It is notable that very literal references to love elegy can be found precisely in the verses that are crucial to this change in content, namely Avian. 2.3 and 2.7–8.[28]

Avian. 2.3	Prop. 3.13.6
Protinus **e rubris conchas** proferret **arenis**	et uenit **e Rubro concha** Erycina **salo**
	Tib. 2.4.30
	uestis et **e Rubro** lucida **concha mari**

While Babr. 115.7 features a similar promise by the turtle (τὰ τῆς Ἐρυθρῆς πάντα δῶρά σοι δώσω),[29] Avianus, in line 3, specifies these gifts as shells with pearls. In doing so, he is picking up Prop. 3.13.6 and Tib. 2.4.30. Thus, Avianus here adds to his model in a very similar way to what we saw above in Avian. 1.4 with the *fores*. Since Avianus is thus alluding to specific lines of verse here, it is crucial that we consider these lines' (original) context: both Prop. 3.13 and Tib. 2.4 thematize the greed of the *puellae* and present it as the cause of all that is bad and evil.[30] Both the intertextual model-lines are part of a 'greed catalogue',[31] a catalogue of goods that are not only

27 For a comparative analysis of Avian. 2 and Babr. 115, cf. Küppers 1977, 111–118.

28 The relation of these verses on a lexical level was set out by Scanzo 2001a, 212–213. On traces of the elegies of Tibullus and Propertius in Avianus' fables, see also Romeo Pallas 1981; 1986.

29 Cf. above, n. 26.

30 Cf. Prop. 3.13.25–50; Tib. 2.4.31–34.

31 Cf. Prop. 3.13.5–8; Tib. 2.4.27–30.

the cause, but also the goal of the *puellae*'s greed. In this light, the turtle's promise of a price that is part of such a catalogue seems quite fitting, as it is trying to incite the greed of the birds. The fact that this price not only corresponds to the model, but is also the only item in the catalogue that the turtle could plausibly promise, adds to the ingenuity of the reference. Also, the reference to a catalogue that presents 'the root of all evil' appears as if a foreshadowing of the turtle's demise.[32] Lines 7–8 contain a similar 'prophecy'.

Avian. 2.7–8	Prop. 3.13.66
(Ast ubi promissis aquilam fallacibus implet,)	**expertast** ueros irrita **lingua** deos
experta est similem perfida **lingua** fidem.	(Tib. 2.4.51)
	(uera quidem moneo, sed prosunt quid mihi uera?)

In Prop. 3.13.66 the poetic 'I' of the elegy compares himself to Cassandra. The foreshadowing of the outcome is, therefore, intertextually charged with a reference to the perhaps best-known prophetess in ancient literature and to the fall of Troy. This also results in a colourful contrast: Cassandra tells the truth and is not believed; the turtle, on the other hand, lies and is heard. In the end, however, both die a similarly gruesome death.[33] Although there are no lexical parallels, the motif of futile truthtelling is also taken up in Tib. 2.4.[34] Therefore, the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas* is not only thematized in Avian. 2 through a change in the motifs and the narrative focus on the lying turtle, but is emphasized through intertextual references to love elegy in particular.

It is noteworthy, however, that the references to love elegy in Avian. 2 are not central topoi of the genre, as is the case with the references in Avian. 1. While material greed is by no means a topic foreign to love elegy, as the two intertexts attest,[35] it is not treated as frequently as the *exclusus amator* or lovers' quarrels. The topic of prophecy is arguably even less prominent in love elegy than that of material greed. Avian. 2 picking up less prominent topics of love elegy can be explained easily by considering the arrangement of the two fables and comparing them side by side.

32 This is all the more plausible as anticipations of this kind are very common in Avianus' fables. For this, cf. Küppers 1977, 85–88.

33 I think it could also be argued that this reference is continued in line 10 (*occidit infelix alitis ungue fero*), with *infelix* referring to the tragic fate of the Trojan and *ungue fero* referring to the dagger of Clytemnestra.

34 Cf. the table above; transl.: "Of course, I herald the truth, but what good is the truth to me?"

35 Cf. e.g. also Tib. 1.1, in which the renunciation of spoils and riches, acquired by various means — most prominently warfare — plays a central role.

2.3 Avian. 1 and 2: their inter-relation and their connection to love elegy

There is an undeniable inter-relation between the first two fables of Avianus, which is created not only by their shared connection to love elegy but also by parallels in topics, motifs, and structure. Firstly, they are connected through their central topic, the dichotomy of *ueritas* and *falsitas*. If we consider the plot and the characters, more parallels become apparent. Both fables begin with a false promise: just as the *rustica nutrix* does not intend to feed the child to the wolf, the *testudo* does not intend to pay the price it promises. Analogous to the gullible wolf who believes this promise in Avian. 1, in Avian. 2 there is the eagle whom the turtle was (seemingly) able to persuade of its promise. After this, the roles of the two actors giving false promises diverge. Since the turtle itself gullibly believes the eagle, it is deceived. The eagle on the other hand appears to correspond to the disillusioned wolf who, after learning that females cannot be trusted, lies to his wife himself. A similar thing is done by the eagle: he deceives the 'deceptress' — as one might say — since *testudo* is a feminine noun.

There is another striking parallel in the protagonists of the fables, the wolf and the turtle, in that both are denied their *uota* because they aimed to achieve them by illicit means. While the wolf expects to get his *praeda* just by waiting (instead of hunting for it), the turtle wants to achieve by deception something that is inappropriate to it.[36] In contrast, the *fabula docet* of Avian. 2 reminds us explicitly that there is no easy or comfortable way to achieve one's goals: if you want *magna*, you must put in *supremus labor*.

The wrongful behaviour of the protagonists is not only related to the question of *ueritas* and *falsitas* but should also be seen in the context of the fables' connection to love elegy, which is first established in Avian. 1 by adopting prominent topoi of that genre. In Avian. 2 the references to love elegy are not such common topoi, but instead are clearly lexical and, in a sophisticated way, refer to the same two poems of the same two authors twice. In light of the ostentatious thematic references to love elegy in Avian. 1, readers will most likely still have this genre in mind when reading Avian. 2. They, therefore, are probably able to identify the lexical references in Avian. 2, which they otherwise might — though not necessarily, of course — have missed. This makes perfect sense from the perspective of an erudite author playfully guiding his readers, which inevitably leads me to my last question:

36 I would argue that being brought back to earth safely is the essential part of the turtle's *uota*, since it is the only part that is explicitly verbalized (Avian. 2.2). Evidently the turtle is denied this part (Avian. 2.10).

how does this connection to love elegy affect the interpretation or evaluation of Avianus' collection as whole?

3 Context and implications: the references to love elegy as metapoetic statements in light of the paratextual *epistula ad Theodosium*

To grasp the importance of these findings for interpreting the collection of Avianus, two factors need to be considered: the position of the two fables within the collection and the paratextual *epistula ad Theodosium*.

Regarding the first, one must at once ask whether we know, or even can know, the original order of the fables within the collection. The answer is as delightful as it is surprising: there is — in comparison to other fable collections[37] — an exceptionally high degree of certainty regarding the order of the fables within Avianus' collection. This is due to the collection's completeness[38] as well as to its broad and consistent manuscript tradition.[39] It is thus rather certain that these are the first two fables of the collection, with the implication that they are intended to present an initial show of skill, and that they probably perform some kind of programmatic function. Further, they must hence also be seen in the context of the paratext that immediately precedes them.

Avian. praef. — epistula ad Theodosium
Dubitanti mihi, Theodosi optime, quonam litterarum
titulo nostri nominis memoriam mandaremus, fabularum
textus occurrit, quod in his urbane concepta falsitas
deceat et non incumbat necessitas ueritatis. nam quis
tecum de oratione, quis de poemate loqueretur? cum in
utroque litterarum genere et Atticos Graeca eruditione
superes, et latinitate Romanos? huius ergo materiae
ducem nobis Aesopum noueris, qui responso Delphici
Apollinis monitus ridicula orsus est ut legenda firmaret.
uerum has pro exemplo fabulas et Socrates diuinis ope-

37 Cf. e.g. the changes regarding the order of the fables made by Zago 2020 in his new critical edition of Phaedrus.

38 Avianus states the scope of his work (cf. *praef.* 15), and a corresponding number of fables survives.

39 There are over 130 manuscripts extant. For a catalogue of the manuscripts, cf. Guaglianone 1958, ix–lix. This catalogue is complemented by Dicke/Grubmüller 1987, lxviii–lxix.

ribus indidit et poemati suo Flaccus aptauit, quod in se,
sub iocorum communium specie, uitae argumenta contineant. quas Graecis iambis Babrius repetens in duo uolumina coartauit. Phaedrus etiam partem aliquam quinque
in libellos resoluit. de his ergo ad quadraginta et duas
in unum redactas fabulas dedi, quas rudi latinitate compositas elegis sum explicare conatus. habes ergo opus,
quo animum oblectes, ingenium exerceas, sollicitudinem
leues, totumque uiuendi ordinem cautus agnoscas. loqui
uero arbores, feras cum hominibus gemere, uerbis certare
uolucres, animalia ridere fecimus, ut pro singulorum necessitatibus uel ab ipsis <in>animis sententia proferatur.[40]
(Avian. *praef.*)

Letter to Theodosius — As I pondered, <my> dearest Theodosius, with which title of literature we should commend the memory of our name, the narrative of fables occurred <to me>, because, in these, wittily elaborated falsity is befitting, and the compulsion for truth is not incumbent. For who could argue with you about rhetoric, who about poetry? While in both genres of literature you surpass the Athenians in Greek erudition, as well as the Romans in Latinity? You know Aesop as our leader in this subject who, prompted by the response of Delphic Apollo, began amusing stories to support that, which should be chosen. But these fables Socrates added to his divine works and Flaccus (= Horace) fitted them into his poetry as examples because they contain stories of real life, under the guise of jests of general application. Taking them up again, Babrius adapted them into two volumes with Greek iambs. Phaedrus also presented another part <of them> in five books. Of these, therefore, I gave 42 fables made into one book which, written in crude Latin, I tried to devise in elegies. Thus, you have a work with which you may delight your spirit, exercise your mind, alleviate sorrows, and, when cautious, <even> understand the whole order of life. But we made trees talk, wild beasts moan with humans, birds fight with words, animals laugh, so that according to the necessity of the single <stories> even an aphorism is brought forth by inanimate things themselves.

(Transl. Chr.P.)

The *epistula* is full of the topoi of dedication-letters as well as of prologues to fable collections, that is, those present in the prologues of Phaedrus and Babrius. A thorough analysis of these topoi would call for a paper of its own, so I can only point out some of them here, as they appear in the two sections of the *epistula* relevant to this study.

The first important section is lines 3–7, the topos of deliberating about which genre to write. Avianus' reasoning for choosing the fable is twofold. An explicit reason is given in the *quod*-clause, namely that, when writing fables, there is no *necessitas ueritatis*, and *urbane concepta falsitas* is befitting (3–4). This obviously refers

40 Although the *epistula* is a prose text, I have retained the formatting of Guaglianone 1958, because its line count makes navigation in the text easier.

to the dichotomy of *ueritas* and *falsitas*, central to fable poetry, and so picks up the related discourse on fictionality.[41] Here the author not only displays his knowledge of the fable genre, but clearly places himself in its tradition. But there is also an implicit reason in the exaltation of the addressee (4–7, again a topos). Avianus confesses that he chose the fable genre because it lies outside the addressee's field of competence which, it seems to be implied, is representative of the literary environment of his time. That is, he chose a genre that was not completely played out, one in which or through which he can still excel. This is undoubtedly to be understood as an earnest expression of literary ambition in the context of the author's time, i.e. the late fourth or early fifth century. This is further corroborated by his approach, the emulative *a Graecis in Latinas* transmission, already mentioned above,[42] which also seems to be hinted at here through the contrast of *Graeca eruditione* (6) and *latinitas* (7).[43]

This directly leads to the second important section, the historical overview of the genre of fable poetry (7–15), and the definition of the scope and content of Avianus' own work (15–17). After the obligatory or even 'necessary' mention of Aesop as inventor of the fable genre,[44] Avianus lists four authors, divided into two pairs, who used or wrote fables: the first pair is Socrates (10) and Horace (11), who did not treat fables as an individual genre, but used single fables in their works. Surely, by naming these great figures as predecessors Avianus is aiming to elevate the fable genre and his own work. The second pair is Babrius (13) and Phaedrus (14), who wrote the only verse fable collections extant today that predate that of Avianus and are, therefore, to be seen as his immediate predecessors.[45]

Although the second pair is evidently programmatic,[46] this historical overview shows no concern for completeness or chronology. It does, however, aptly depict the evolution of fable and fable poetry: from its beginning and the initial use of fables as a rhetorical means of persuasion or as illustrative examples, portrayed through the first pair, to the independent literary genre of collections in metre,

41 Cf. above § 2.1, esp. n. 17.

42 Cf. above § 1, esp. n. 7.

43 Cf. Küppers 1977, 205–207.

44 Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 1 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 1 *prol.* 15.

45 Cf. Küppers 1977, 181–184.

46 Babrius is the model for Avianus, cf. above. The fables of Phaedrus also serve as a direct model for Avianus: they in some cases can clearly be traced behind content-related changes in Avianus' fable adaptations in relation to the Babrian versions. Küppers 1977 examined and demonstrated such connections between Avian. 37 and Phaed. 3.7 Z. [= G.], and between Avian. 34 and Phaed. 5.24 Z. [= 4.25 G.], and I myself have done so for Avian. 8 and Phaed. 3.18 Z. [= G.]. Cf. Küppers 1977, 140–156; Poms 2022, 257–260.

illustrated by the second pair. Further, in light of Avianus' *a Graecis in Latinas* approach, which appears to be reflected in the first pair, it seems plausible that he has deliberately rejected chronological order in the second pair, mentioning the Greek-writing Babrius before the Latin work of Phaedrus, further emphasizing this approach.

These two sections of the *epistula* leave the reader with a clear picture of a self-confident and ambitious author who aims to excel in his contemporary literary environment and to surpass his predecessors in fable poetry. This is further corroborated by the fact that Avianus defines his own work immediately after the historical overview (15–17), implicitly presenting it as the pinnacle of the fable genre. Avianus mentions the metrical form of his fables, the elegiac distich (*elegis*, 16), as their defining feature that sets them apart from those of his predecessors.[47] In Avianus' time, the Late Latin period, the elegiac distich was a universally used metre, no longer restricted to certain subjects or content, as it had been in the Classical period of the language. Nevertheless, even in the context of the Late Latin period, the stylistic level of the elegiac distich has to be considered higher than that of the iambs of Phaedrus and Babrius. Thus, the decision to use it is certainly an instance of Avianus' *aemulatio*. I would argue, however, that this is not the only aspect of *aemulatio* relevant to his choice of this specific metre. This is where love elegy comes into play: on the one hand, it is the genre that most prominently used the elegiac distich in the Classical period, on which Late Antique literature so clearly focuses,[48] so one could even argue that Avianus' mention of the 'elegiac form' as the distinctive feature of his fables would have led a Late Antique reader to expect some degree of interaction with love elegy in particular. On the other hand, and by no means of less importance, is the poetic ideal that shaped it: Avianus, given the literary erudition he puts on display, surely knew that Roman love elegy, like fable poetry, was greatly influenced by the ideal of the Hellenistic Alexandrines.[49] This poetic ideal enjoyed a renaissance in Avianus' lifetime,[50] and can plausibly be assumed to lie behind the statement in lines 4–7 of the *epistula*, where Avianus says that he chose fables because of their their standing as a minor genre. Further, Roman love elegy itself arguably constitutes a rather 'minor' or 'small' genre. It seems plausible that, analogous to the choice of the fable genre, its 'smallness' could have played a role

47 The mention of the metre used is a topos found also in Phaedrus and Babrius. Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 2 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 1 *prol.* 19.

48 Cf. above § 1.

49 Cf. e.g. on love elegy, Holzberg 2015, 7–15; on Babrius, Spielhofer 2022 and 2023, *passim*, esp. 51–71; on Phaedrus, Gärtner 2015, 59–61.

50 Cf. e.g. Ausonius.

in Avianus' choice of love elegy in regard to intertextuality. Since the elegiac form is mentioned in the same sentence as the self-deprecating assessment in the *epistula*,[51] one could even argue that the 'smallness' of the genre of love elegy might correspond to this as a topos. Avianus, that is, chose the genre of fable poetry also for the poetic ideals that shaped it, which, at the same time, influenced the one genre in Classical Latin literature that most prominently used the metre he himself has chosen.

If we view the analysis of Avian. 1 and 2 against this background, a deep and intricate intertextual connection between the two genres of love elegy and fable poetry seems to be established at the beginning of Avianus' collection. This connection comprises the three different levels of metre, motivation or aesthetics, and intertextual references, allowing Avianus to emphasize and simultaneously realize his intention of *aemulatio* as would not have been possible with any other genre.

If we bear this in mind, the change in message in the second fable urges a metapoetic reading, since Avian. 2.14 (*non sine supremo magna labore peti*) picks up the well-known motif of *labor* which, although quite popular in Classical Latin literature in general, is especially widespread in poetry influenced by the ideal of Hellenistic Alexandrines:[52] Avianus is striving for *magna* in trying to surpass his predecessors in verse fable poetry and to excel in his contemporary literary environment. Without doubt, the means by which he aims to achieve that, and presents here, i.e. intertextual references, the many levels of which are rightly called "*inter (se) texta*", involve the utmost *labor*.

4 Summary and outlook

The references to Roman love elegy in the first two fables of Avianus' collection were long seen as just some among many clumsy attempts by a mediocre author to 'jazz up' his small book of fables in a way typical of Late Antiquity, namely by referring to the great poets of the Classical period. On closer inspection, they turn out to be witty instances of intertextuality, skilfully interlacing the text with a subtext. If we also take into account the paratext, a multi-layered connection between the genre of the work itself — fable poetry — and the genre referenced — love elegy — opens up before the reader's eyes. Against the background of the *epistula*, these references also facilitate the development of a metapoetic statement over the

51 Cf. above n. 6.

52 Cf. e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.59; Catull. 1.4–7.

course of these fables that, due to their position, are programmatic, expressing the author's hard work and ambition. All things considered, this — as I hope I have been able to show — could hardly have been done in a more elaborate or fitting way, or by using any other genre as a point of reference.

Since this paper has only been able to look at references to one genre in a small part of the collection, there is — and it seems trivial to point this out — a lot more that Avianus' fables have to offer in terms of metapoetic statements, intertextuality, and even intertextual references specifically to Roman love elegy. Two rather obvious examples of this are, on the one hand, the following fable, Avian. 3 ("*de cancro et matre*"), which, in my opinion, has great potential for metapoetic interpretation, and on the other hand Avian. 22 ("*de cupido et inuido*"), which apparently again picks up topoi from love elegy. Further, the interconnection between the first two fables seems to hint strongly that the collection as a whole has a well-thought-out composition that has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

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Part III: **Fable and Comedy**

Babette Pütz

Not For Beetle Brains: Fables in Aristophanes

Abstract: The fable most frequently used in Aristophanes' comedies is that of "The Dung beetle and the Eagle". It appears in *Vespae*, *Pax*, and *Lysistrata*, each time with a slightly different focus and new jokes. This fable lends itself perfectly to Aristophanes' humour and it comes as no surprise that in all three passages the fable-tellers identify themselves with the lowly dung beetle, who triumphs over the much stronger eagle and even tricks Zeus himself. Furthermore, the fable is used to highlight other important themes in the plays: in *Vespae* the theme of a role-reversal of old and young, in *Pax* the rivalry between comedy and tragedy, and in *Lysistrata* gender.

1 Introduction

Dung beetles are funny: The little insects roll dung — their food — into balls much larger than themselves, climb up onto the balls with great effort and clumsily tumble down at the other side. Also, their apparent business and persistence in their job of tidying up other animals' messes have something humorous about it. The ancient Greeks evidently saw this the same way as we do now, so it does not come as too much of a surprise that the fable most frequently embedded in Aristophanes' comedies is that of the dung beetle and the eagle. The three relevant passages are *Vesp.* 1446–1449, *Pax* 127–314, and *Lys.* 695. The repetition of the same fable does not become boring however, because in each instance Aristophanes has a focus on a slightly different aspect of the fable and uses it for different jokes. This chapter, which aims to be a starting point for a wider conversation about fables in Aristophanes, will analyse these three passages as examples for the great versatility with which Aristophanes employs fable allusions.

2 Aesop's fable of "The Dung beetle and the Eagle"

This fable has been transmitted in three versions (Aesop. 3 I–III Hsr.), starting with a simple, straightforward tale (3 I) which became more and more embellished,

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especially in *Vit. Aesop*. 135–139 G [= 3 III Hsr.].[1] Aesop's fable, in its simplest form, tells the following story:[2] A dung beetle tried to save a hare from an eagle, warning the eagle that the hare was under his protection, but the eagle killed and devoured the hare, as he overlooked the dung beetle because of his small size.[3] Angrily, and unnoticed by the eagle, the dung beetle followed the bird to his nest and, whenever the eagle laid an egg, the dung beetle smashed it. The eagle was upset.[4] So he placed his eggs into Zeus' lap for protection. The dung beetle, however, made a dung ball and placed it into the god's lap.[5] Zeus completely forgot about the eggs in his lap and stood up to shake the dung ball off his clothes, so that the eagle's eggs were broken yet again. Since then, eagles never lay eggs at times when dung beetles are about.[6]

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1 We cannot be sure which version of the fable Aristophanes refers to. His allusions do not mention any material which is not already found in version I Hsr.

2 Aesop. 3 P. [= 3 I Hsr.; 4 Ch.]; cf. *Vit. Aesop.* 135–139 G. The fable is found in three slightly different versions (cf. 3 I–III Hsr.); the first reads like this: ΑΕΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΝΘΑΡΟΣ. ἀετὸς λαγωὸν ἐδίωκεν. ὁ δὲ ἐν ἐρημίᾳ τῶν βοηθησόντων ὑπάρχων, ὃν μόνον ὁ καιρὸς παρέσχεν, κάνθαρον ἰδὼν, τοῦτον ἱκέτευεν. ὁ δὲ παραθαρσύνας αὐτὸν, ὡς ἐγγὺς ἐλθόντα τὸν ἀετὸν ἐθεάσατο, παρεκάλει μὴ ἀπάγειν αὐτοῦ τὸν ἱκέτην. κάκεῖνος ὑπεριδὼν τῆν σμικρότητα ἐν ὄψει τοῦ κανθάρου τὸν λαγωὸν κατεθοινήσατο. ὁ δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνου μνησικακῶν διετέλει παρατηρούμενος τοῦ ἀετοῦ τὰς καλιὰς καί, εἴ ποτε ἐκεῖνος ἔτικτε, μετάρσιος αἰρόμενος ἐκύλιε τὰ ὠὰ καὶ κατέασσε, μέχρις οὗ πανταχόθεν ἐλαυνόμενος ὁ ἀετὸς ἐπὶ τὸν Δία κατέφυγεν — καὶ αὐτοῦ ἐδεήθη τόπον αὐτῷ πρὸς νεοττοποιίαν ἀσφαλῆ παρασχεῖν. τοῦ δὲ Διὸς ἐν τοῖς κόλποις αὐτοῦ τίκτειν ἐπιτρέψαντος αὐτῷ ὁ κάνθαρος τοῦτο ἐωρακὼς, κόπρου σφαῖραν ποιήσας ἀνέπτη καὶ γενόμενος κατὰ τοὺς τοῦ Διὸς κόλπους ἐνταῦθα καθῆκεν. ὁ δὲ Ζεὺς ἀποσείσασθαι τὴν κόπρον βουλόμενος, ὡς διανέστη ἔλαθεν τὰ ὠά ἀπορρίψας. ἀπ' ἐκείνου τέ φασιν περὶ ὃν καιρὸν οἱ κάνθαροι γίνονται, τοὺς ἀετοὺς μὴ νεοττεύειν. — ὁ λόγος διδάσκει μηδενὸς καταφρονεῖν, λογιζομένους ὅτι οὐδεὶς οὕτως ἐστὶν ἀδύνατος ὡς προπηλακισθεὶς μὴ δύνασθαι ποτε ἑαυτὸν ἐκδικῆσαι. On the tradition of this fable in antiquity, see von Möllendorff 1994, 141–161.

3 In fable 3 III Hsr., the eagle not only notices the dung beetle and chooses to disregard him, but also brushes him away with his wing.

4 In fable 3 III Hsr., the eagle blames Zeus' wrath for the loss of his eggs, thinking that the god wants to make eagles a rarer species.

5 In contrast, in fable 3 III Hsr., the beetle, full of dung, flies at Zeus' face, rather than dropping a dung ball into his lap. Furthermore, version III Hsr. foregrounds Zeus' role as protector of suppliants, with Zeus displaying a keen sense of retributive justice: He points out that it is the eagle himself who is responsible for his sufferings. The stronger moralistic tone and emphasis on justice in this version of the fable might be explained by it being part of the *Accursiana* recension of the fable corpus (possibly by the Byzantine monk Planudes: see Karla 2003, 661–662).

6 This part is particularly embellished in version III Hsr. of this fable, including a conversation between Zeus and the dung beetle about the eagle's guilt, the beetle's refusal to stop his revenge and Zeus, wanting to preserve the species of eagles, changing the eagles' nesting time to a time of year without dung beetles. The *scholion* to *Pax* 130 mentions some slight variants to the fable, in particular that the eagle offended the beetle by stealing its young (rather than by killing the

This fable is an aetiology, explaining why the breeding-season of eagles is at a time when no dung beetles are seen. It tells a story which continues over quite a long time for a fable: multiple years, or, more specifically in version III, three eagle breeding seasons. In this way, this fable depicts the dung beetle as holding a grudge for a very long time and being extremely tenacious in his efforts to take revenge on the eagle. The cause of the anger of the dung beetle is important, too, as (at least in the best-known versions) it was not the insect itself who was harmed by the eagle, but a hare that the dung beetle had tried to protect from the eagle. This places the dung beetle in this fable in a strongly positive light, as a defender of what is morally right, rather than his own interests.

The dung beetle is the typical fable creature that wins against the odds: the small, lowly dung beetle outwits the eagle, Zeus' special bird, and not only once, but repeatedly, and even manages to trick Zeus himself.[7] The dung beetle in Aesop's fable, in fact, is shown to use its small size to its advantage, as it makes it easy for him to remain unnoticed, while following the eagle to find his nest, and then to hide, after destroying the eggs. The beetle's great strength relative to his size and the ability to roll large round objects enable him to break the eagle's eggs, in combination with his cleverness, tenacity and even his disgustingness, which he employs shamelessly in order to make Zeus jump up in revulsion. For such a small, low-status insect, this dung beetle certainly has much destructive power and he has our sympathies against the cruel, arrogant eagle.

It is surprising that the eagle, as Zeus' special bird, seems to be unaware of the god being the protector of those who are seeking refuge. Had he taken this fact into consideration, surely, he would have realized that getting Zeus involved, by placing his eggs into the god's lap, might be counterproductive. It is not clear whether the eagle is meant to be ignorant or arrogant. Is he ignoring Zeus' role as protector of refugees because he feels so sure of his special relationship with the god that he

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refugee-hare). This variant does not make much of a difference for a discussion of Aristophanes' use of the fable. See Sommerstein 1985, ad *Pax* 133; Olson 1998, xxxiv–xxxv; Ewbank 1980, 184–185 mentions Semonides *fr*. 11 West and Lucian. *Icar*. 10 as further sources relating to aspects of this fable. Semonides' fragment has been interpreted as quoting Zeus' words when he sees the flying beetle (ἑρπετόν) in the context of this fable. He is depicted as saying that this insect was leading the worst way of life of all creatures, clearly commenting on its involvement with dung. The Lucan passage briefly mentions that Aesop had eagles, beetles (κάνθαροι) (and sometimes camels) go to heaven. Neither passage tells us much about the actual plot of the fable.

7 There was even a proverb, κανθάρου σοφώτερος – "cleverer than a dung beetle", which according to Zenobius (4.65) was derived from this fable. The exact meaning of the proverb is unclear, but as Zenobius connects it with this particular fable, it seems best to translate it as "*even* cleverer than the dung beetle", so the sense is that the dung beetle, as in the fable, is a particularly clever creature.

does not even question whether the god will support his side, no matter the issue of the dispute? Yet, the eagle is punished for his crime of killing the hare not once, but repeatedly, by losing his entire brood. It also does not make sense that the eagle, in version III Hsr., after his eggs have been destroyed a second time and he is unable to find the culprit, concludes that it must be Zeus' intention to eliminate the race of eagles, but then, illogically, decides to place his eggs into the protection of exactly the god whom he considers responsible for having destroyed his eggs twice already.

Zeus clearly cares deeply about the protection of supplicants because, in version III, even though at the end of the fable the eagle has lost its eggs, which should be a fair enough revenge for his crime, he has no sympathy for the eagle but tells him that he got his just deserts.[8] It is surprising that Zeus, in this particular version of the fable, refers to the eagle's crime as having mistreated the beetle, not as having mistreated the hare, but it is likely that this phrasing is meant to keep the focus on the antagonistic relationship of the two enemies only.

Also in the third version, Aesop's dung beetle still does not feel that the eagle has been punished enough and reminds Zeus that his own bird has also been blasphemous towards him, but now Zeus, like a parent of two children who refuse to stop bickering, has finally had enough and finds a strategy to separate them. Furthermore, eagles are his favourite birds and so he devises a practical solution which will ensure that eagles will be able to breed without being attacked by dung beetles, by shifting their breeding season into a beetle-free time of year.

What is this fable's moral, then?[9] Most obviously: Do not believe that, only because you are strong and have powerful friends, you will not have to pay for your misdeeds. Or, the other way around: Nobody is too powerless to take revenge when they are angry enough. And possibly: At some point it is time to stop one's revenge, even when one is morally in the right.

So, this fable is one of the tales where the underdog wins the day. Most strikingly, the dung beetle uses its own disgustingness successfully to trick the king of

8 Aesop. 3 III.18–22 Hsr.: μαθὼν δὲ πρὸς τοῦ κανθάρου, ὅτι ταῦτ᾽ ἔδρασε τὸν ἀετὸν ἀμυνόμενος, οὐ γὰρ δὴ τὸν κάνθαρον ἐκεῖνος μόνον ἠδίκησεν ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὸν Δία αὐτὸν ἠσέβησε, πρὸς τὸν ἀετὸν εἶπεν ἐλθόντα κάνθαρον εἶναι τὸν λυποῦντα καὶ δὴ καὶ δικαίος λυπεῖν; ("When Zeus had learned of the wrong that the dung beetle had suffered and that he had acted in this way towards the eagle in revenge, as he [the eagle] not only had mistreated the dung beetle but also had acted impiously towards Zeus himself, he [Zeus] said to the eagle, upon his return, that the dung beetle was the aggrieved one and for this reason justly gave pain to him [the eagle]").

9 Sommerstein 1983, *ad Vesp.* 1448, mentions the following morals: "Nobody is so powerless that he cannot take revenge if insulted" and "The wicked will not escape retribution even if they flee to the bosom of Zeus" but without their sources. Ewbank 1980, 185, cites as a source Aesop. 3 P. [= 3 I Hsr.].

the gods himself. The combination of θεομαχία and scatology in this fable was clearly irresistible to a comedian like Aristophanes. The following part of this chapter will discuss each of the three instances in which Aristophanes employs this fable. In all three relevant comedies, the fable-telling characters, unsurprisingly, associate themselves with the fable's protagonist, the dung beetle.

3 The fable in Aristophanes

3.1 *Vespae*

Vespae is a play which is particularly full of fable-telling, fitting its animal theme.[10] *Vespae* tells the story of an old man, Philocleon, who suffers from an extreme obsession with attending jury service, to his son Bdelycleon's great annoyance. The young man has taken over the running of the household, and, to avoid embarrassment through his father's unconventional behaviour, has locked him up in his own house to prevent him from attending jury service.

After the fight with the wasp-chorus and the famous dog-trial, Bdelycleon, who enjoys luxurious drinking parties with his aristocratic friends, tries to teach his father, who prefers to live a poor man's lifestyle and detests the pretentious behaviour of his son's wealthy friends, how to behave properly at a symposium. This includes advice on what sorts of stories to tell, not only to amuse and entertain the other guests, but also to talk himself out of difficulties, in case he gets himself into trouble when drunk: λόγον [...] ἀστεῖον [...] Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοιον ἢ Συβαριτικόν ("You can tell him <your accuser> some witty story, a funny Aesopic or Sybaritic fable", Ar. *Vesp.* 1258–1259), ὧν ἔμαθες ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ· κᾆτ' ἐς γέλων τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἔτρεψας, ὥστ' ἀφείς σ' ἀποίχεται ("one of the stories you learned at the party, and then you've turned the whole thing into a joke, so he lets you off and goes on his merry way", Ar. *Vesp.* 1260–1261).[11]

Finally, Bdelycleon takes his father to a symposium, where Philocleon indeed gets very drunk and tells a number of witty, but offending stories and then departs, with a flute-girl in tow, and commits theft, vandalism and assault. As his son recommended, Philocleon tells his accusers fables (Ar. *Vesp.* 1399–1440), but they are outrageous inventions of his own, which are not intended to mollify the accusers'

10 Schirru 2009, 70, calls Philocleon a true Aesopic hero (vero e propio eroe esopico) in a drama that pays homage to Aesop.

11 Translations of Aristophanes are taken from Henderson (1998 and 2000), sometimes with small changes.

righteous anger, but to rudely dismiss their complaints. Just before things get completely out of hand, Bdelycleon storms onto the stage, picks up his father and carries him back into the house.

In his indignation at his son's restraining him, Philocleon tries to tell a short story which is a combination of a tale from the *Life of Aesop* and the fable of the dung beetle and the eagle.[12] The fact that it is enough to merely allude to both stories very briefly shows how well-known they must have been to the audience.

Φ: Αἴσωπον οἱ Δελφοί ποτ' – Β: ὀλίγον μοι μέλει.
Φ: – φιάλην ἐπῃτιῶντο κλέψαι τοῦ θεοῦ.
ὁ δ' ἔλεξεν αὐτοῖς ὡς ὁ κάνθαρός ποτε –
Β: οἴμ' ὡς ἀπολεῖς με τοῖσι σοῖσι κανθάροις.
(Ar. *Vesp*. 1445–1448)

Philocleon: "One time the Delphians accused Aesop –" Bdelycleon: "I'm not interested." Philocleon: "– of stealing a bowl from the god. He told them how once upon a time the beetle –" Bdelycleon: "Damn it, you'll be the death of me with these beetles!"[13]
(Transl. Henderson)

The first part of Philocleon's fable alludes to a well-known story that Aesop, annoyed that he was not rewarded, as he felt he should be, by the Delphians for his fable-telling, made some insulting remarks about them.[14] In revenge, the Delphians, who were worried that he would give them a bad reputation in Greece, decided on a plot to kill him: When he was leaving Delphi, they secretly put in his luggage a golden bowl taken from a temple to Apollo, then caught him on his way, sued him for sacrilege and condemned him to death.

According to this story, Aesop, before his execution, told the Delphians the story of the dung beetle and the eagle, hinting that they would pay for treating him so badly, no matter how powerful and closely connected with a god they were.[15] In *Vespae*, Philocleon implies the same message, directed at his son. Bdelycleon may

12 See Pertsinidis 2020, 141–159 for a detailed analysis of the meaning of the dung beetle fable in connection with Aesop's situation in this story. See Konstantakos 2021, 245–246 for a short discussion of Philocleon's affinity with fables.

13 For a detailed and convincing discussions of the different emendations to this line, see Biles/Olson 2015, *ad Vesp.* 1449.

14 See *scholia* and *Vit. Aesop.* 124 G with Sommerstein 1983 and Biles/Olson 2015, *ad Vesp.* 1446–1447.

15 See Biles/Olson 2015; Sommerstein 1983, *ad Vesp.* 1446–1448. Hausrath's version III of the fable is quoted at this place in the *Vita Aesopi*. Schirru 2009, 57 stresses that the joke of the fable lies not so much in its content but the background story, with Philocleon comparing his own situation, which he feels is unjust, to that of Aesop's unjust accusation by the Delphians. Schirru 2009, 98, notes that the joke of the passage lies in the cheekiness of Philocleon comparing himself to Aesop.

be physically stronger and well connected, but Philocleon refuses to put up with his bad treatment. It is notable, though, and adds to the humour of the passage, that while Aesop in this story was innocent and wrongly accused, Philocleon is clearly guilty of theft and several other misdemeanours.[16]

In this short passage, Philocleon has turned the tables on his son: He does indeed employ Bdelycleon's advice to tell a fable when in trouble, but uses it against Bdelycleon himself. The focus in this scene is on the two characters' role reversal, with old Philocleon now acting like an irresponsible, out-of-control youngster. Like a stereotypical young man, inexperienced in proper behaviour at a symposium, he gets completely drunk, causes much mayhem, runs off with a flute-girl (Ar. *Vesp.* 1368–1369) and adds insult to injury through his insolent stories, when he is confronted by the victims of his drunken behaviour. All the wine he has drunk has somehow rejuvenated him, and he uses his new-found energies for nothing but mischief.

His son, who clearly avoided getting drunk at the party, yet is unable to rein in his father's behaviour, is exasperated and highly embarrassed by the old man, as one would expect a stereotypical father in comedy to be with his stereotypical teenage son. At this point in the play, he is at a loss as to how to prevent Philocleon from doing more harm, except by physically wrestling the unruly old man back into the house (Ar. *Vesp.* 1443–1445).

This change of roles is cleverly emphasized through the use of the fable: Philocleon identifies himself with the beetle who is tricking Zeus into jumping up off his throne, whereas earlier in the play, speaking about his adult-role as a juror, he compared himself to Zeus, regarding his power. Then he said: ἆρ᾽ οὐ μεγάλην ἀρχὴν ἄρχω καὶ τοῦ Διὸς οὐδὲν ἐλάττω, | ὅστις ἀκούω ταὔθ᾽ ἅπερ ὁ Ζεύς ("So don't I wield great authority, as great as Zeus? I'm even spoken of in the same way as Zeus.", Ar. *Vesp.* 619–620). The shift in perspective goes hand in hand with the great versatility Philocleon displays when re-imagining himself as all sorts of animals in his escape attempts earlier in the play (Ar. *Vesp.* 126–213). He is an opportunist who changes roles as it fits his needs at any given moment.

16 Van Dijk 1997, 193, notes that the jar stands for the vase in which legal evidence was kept. Avdoulou 2020, 123–125 and 128–130, interprets the use of this fable as a threat, in *Vespae* and other comedies and connects it with the iambic tradition. However, here Philocleon seems to be more concerned with defending himself against his son physically removing him from the scene, rather than uttering a threat. Similarly, in the dung beetle scene in *Pax*, Trygaeus is not planning to threaten Zeus but to ask him the question what the god was trying to do to the Greeks (ἐρησόμενος […] ὅ τι ποιεῖν βουλεῦεται; "asking […] what he is going to do", Ar. *Pax* 105–106) and will only indict him should he refuse to answer (Ar. *Pax* 107–108). Trygaeus does meet gods in the play, but never comes face to face with Zeus.

It was Bdelycleon himself, who previously had insisted that Philocleon was not like the king of the gods at all, but in fact was manipulated by the demagogue Cleon and his cronies. Now, the old man seems to finally have accepted his son's opinion, but not in the way that the young man had intended, i.e. that his father would quit his jury service and lead the quiet life of a respectable old man at home. Instead, Philocleon takes on the fierce, relentless and uncouth behaviour of the lowly dung beetle; and we, the audience, cheer for him (like we do for the dung beetle) when he makes his son regret over and over again to ever have locked him up against his will. Even after Bdelycleon drags Philocleon back into the house in this scene, he manages to pop out one last time and end the play in his very own style with a wild dancing competition — which undoubtedly would have been regarded as highly embarrassing by Bdelycleon. Here no *deus ex machina* appears to separate father and son, as Zeus does with the beetle and the eagle in the fable.

Vespae is teaming with animals — Philocleon pretending to be all sorts of animals, the wasp-chorus, the dogs in trial, a real-life donkey, animal comparisons galore and the exuberant crab-dance in the finale of the play. This fits the central theme of the play: the power of φύσις (nature) — represented by Philocleon — versus νόμος (custom) — represented by Bdelycleon. Aristophanes here, in a way, creates his own version of an animal-fable which includes further fables.[17] The beetle imagery fits not only the chorus' insect theme but also the play's sympotic focus,[18] as the same word, κάνθαρος, connotes both 'dung beetle' and the kind of bowl which was used at drinking parties to mix the wine.[19]

3.2 *Pax*

Just a year later, in 421 BCE, Aristophanes not only alludes to the dung beetle-fable again in *Pax*, but makes the dung beetle a wonderful stage-prop for a striking start to an otherwise less exuberant play. In *Pax*, the beetle serves (literally) as a comic means of air-travel, to comment on the rivalry of tragedy and comedy and, of course, to make jokes on the beetle's unsavoury feeding habits.

In this play, the protagonist, a farmer called Trygaeus, is so exasperated with the Peloponnesian War that he flies to heaven to personally ask Zeus why he

17 This is the case especially when his animal characters are used allegorically (like the dogs standing for two military leaders and politicians). As Miles 2017, 216, points out: "Here Aristophanes can take full advantage of the visual and musical opportunities offered by live-action performance drama in presenting the mix of human and animal."

18 See Pütz 2007, 19–32.

19 See LSJ s.v. κάνθαρος I. and II.

intends to destroy Greece. His ascent to heaven is an obvious parody of Bellerophon from Euripides' tragedy of the same name, yet Trygaeus' steed is not a spectacular Pegasus, but a lowly (even if grossly over-sized) dung beetle.[20] In practice, this was a model of a dung beetle, large enough for a man to ride on and attached to the stage-crane. It would have been a great spectacle and quite a surprise for the audience to see the same stage machinery, which in tragedy is used to let gods literally fly down from heaven to earth and solve human problems, now instead be employed to carry a human character up to the gods to take human affairs in his own hands, as the comic gods are clearly incapable and unwilling to help.

The play, like *Vespae*, starts with two slaves in conversation. The first slave is on stage, rolling cakes from a large mixing-dish filled with dung, whereas the second one rushes out of the door of Trygaeus' house, grabs a finished dung-cake and races back inside.[21] These are the first words of the play: αἶρ᾽ αἶρε μᾶζαν ὡς τάχιστα κανθάρῳ ("Give, give me a cake for the beetle, as quickly as possible!", Ar. *Pax* 1). The joke is here that κάνθαρος, beetle, is the same as the name of another comic poet, a rival of Aristophanes, who won the previous year's contest at the City Dionysia.[22] Not before line 7, when the audience hears that the dung-eater has rolled the cake with its feet (ποδοῖν, Ar. *Pax* 7) do they understand that this is about a dung beetle, not a human, though they would wonder how on earth a tiny dung beetle would swallow whole an entire dung-cake (ὅλην ἐνέκαψε, Ar. *Pax* 7). In real life, dung beetles only form their balls above ground, but eat them under ground,[23] but such a description of its rapacious appetite and stunning eating habits would be too funny to be left out in a comedy.

Ποδοῖν (Ar. *Pax* 7), feet, is, tellingly, in the dual form, meaning 'two feet'. This movement has been compared to real life dung beetle-behaviour, as they stand up on their two hind feet and use their front legs to shape any faeces they pick up into balls, as well as to the way in which they use their two fore *tibiae* to cut pieces out of dung, which they will then roll into balls, a movement which fits Aristophanes' description better and could, like in the ancient text, be mistaken for eating.[24]

Most importantly, the way Aristophanes describes the beetle to behave fits both the insect and a human, and this particular dung beetle, as we will see, repeatedly

20 It is unclear when this play was produced, sometime between 450 (the approx. beginning of the tragedian's career) and 426 BCE; see Olson 1998, xxxii.

21 Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 1–19 discusses the problems with line divisions in this passage. For my purposes here, it is not important which slave speaks which lines.

22 This is first suggested by Sommerstein 1990, *ad Pax* 1. As Sommerstein points out here, with references, being a 'shit-eater' was not an uncommon insult in ancient comedy.

23 Davies/Kathirithamby 1986, 88.

24 See Sommerstein 1990, *ad Pax* 7; Davies/Kathirithamby 1986, 89.

crosses the boundaries of human and animal: we are told that it has teeth (γομφίους ["molars"], Ar. *Pax* 34)[25] and two hands or arms (τὼ χεῖρέ, Ar. *Pax* 35). Furthermore, it can speak (φησιν, Ar. *Pax* 12) and is so conceited as to refuse to eat any dung that has not been kneaded to perfection (Ar. *Pax* 26). This description, using a mixture of human and animal features, and the beetle's extremely large size, combined with its revolting eating habits, make it a particularly grotesque and memorable fabulous creature, which immediately catches the audience's attention and draws them into the play before they even have seen the protagonist or heard what the plot will be about.

This scene gives the two slaves plenty of opportunity for excrement-related humour, including a joke on the expense of Cleon as a κεῖνος ἀναιδέως τὴν σπατίλην ἐσθίει ("shameless shit-eater", Ar. *Pax* 48), making the dung beetle into a political metaphor.[26] The reference to Cleon as an extra-large dung beetle in the underworld may also have been intended to remind the audience of Aristophanes' comedy *Vespae* from the previous year, in which he had depicted Cleon as a human-sized dog.[27]

In the following passage, one of the slaves, similar to the two slaves in *Vespae*, describes his master's mad behaviour, shouting at Zeus all the time. We hear that Trygaeus tried to reach heaven by climbing long ladders, but eventually fell off and injured his head. So instead, the previous day, he bought himself an enormous Etna Beetle (Ar. *Pax* 73), which he calls ὦ Πηγάσιόν μοι [...] γενναῖον πτερὸν ("my little Pegasus, my thoroughbred flyer", Ar. *Pax* 76) and treats like a young horse. This explains the monstrous size of the dung beetle (which the audience at this point is still only guessing at, as they have not yet seen the stage-prop) as Mount Aetna allegedly — that is, according to several mentions in ancient comedy and satyr play — was home to giant, man-sized beetles.[28] The endearing address of the

25 Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 33–34 explains the choice of words, molars instead of incisors, with its association of gluttony.

26 On the dung beetle as political metaphor, see Hall 2013, 293–294. Rosen 1988, 28–35, focusses on the identity of an Ionian audience member, whom the slave imagines here as speaking to another spectator, so linking the fable to the genre iambus. Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 47–48 refutes Rosen's 1988, 30–31 claim that this is a "proleptic allusion" to Aesopic fable. Olson thinks αἰνίσσεται (47) here, as elsewhere refers to uttering "any sort of dark and allusive sayings", including oracles which also often contain animal imagery. On the use of bad smells in this play to denote problems and war, see Bowie 1993, 135–136.

27 This character speaks Greek and so will have been played by a human actor. See also Miles 2017, 222.

28 See Davies/Kathirithamby 1986, 86; Sommerstein 1990 and Olson 1998, both *ad Pax* 72–73, all with references, especially from comedy and satyr play.

oversized insect as ὦ Πηγάσιόν μοι ("my little Pegasus", Ar. *Pax* 76) and πτερόν ("wing" or "flyer", Ar. *Pax* 76) is a parody of a line of Euripides' tragedy *Bellerophon* (Eur. *Beller. fr.* 306). Indeed, the entire passage of Trygaeus' flight to heaven is a parody of Bellerophon's flight in Euripides' play.[29]

Now the moment has come when the hefty dung beetle, with Trygaeus sitting astride it, is lifted into the air above the stage and the spectacle becomes visible to the audience (Ar. *Pax* 80–81).[30] As the slave has already told us, Trygaeus speaks with and treats the dung beetle like a Pegasus (Ar. *Pax* 82–89), except when he asks for all latrines to be walled shut and all arseholes to be locked up (Ar. *Pax* 99–101), presumably so the dung beetle will not be distracted from its path to heaven and lured back down to earth. Indeed, dung beetles rely on their sense of smell and hardly on their vision and hearing.[31] In antiquity it was even believed that dung beetles hated and could be harmed by sweet smells and could be killed by the smell of roses, rose petals, rose oil or perfume.[32]

Trygaeus' instructions here are written in anapaests, fitting the tragic parody as the same metre is used in the corresponding scene in Euripides' play. The diction is tragic, too, only for Aristophanes to suddenly drop to low level language when talking about the beetle's bad-smelling breath (μὴ πνεῖ μοι κακόν, "Don't breathe bad breath on me!", Ar. *Pax* 87) and people's bottoms (πρωκτούς, Ar. *Pax* 101), both reminding the audience of the disgustingness of the dung beetle.

Neither Trygaeus' slaves nor his daughter can persuade the comic hero to change his plans and come back to earth. Finally, he answers his daughter's question why he is flying a dung beetle to heaven (Ar. *Pax* 127–128) with a reference to Aesop: ἐν τοῖσιν Αἰσώπου λόγοις ἐξηυρέθη μόνος πετηνῶν εἰς θεοὺς ἀφιγμένος ("In Aesop's fables it's the only winged thing I could find that ever reached the gods.", Ar. *Pax* 129–130). This is a comic incongruency: In this fable, the eagle also flies to Zeus, and even arrives there first (before the dung beetle). It is only at first sight surprising that Trygaeus here completely ignores the eagle, as not only would Trygaeus not want to be associated with the loser of the fable, but also because the eagle, as a well-known symbol of war, is antithetical to Trygaeus.[33] To this, one could add that the eagle was seen as a kingly bird, so social class may also play a role here,

29 Cf. Sommerstein 1990, *ad Pax* 76; Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 76–77 and Intro, Section 3; Rau 1967, 89–97.

30 The beetle is wearing a bridle and reins and possibly a saddlecloth, but no saddle or stirrups; Sommerstein 1985, *ad Pax* 80–81.

31 Halffter/Matthews, 1966, 87 and Davies/Kathirithamby 1986, 88: "for these insects 'olfaction is the dominant sense' with visual and auditory stimuli very little, if at all developed".

32 Cf. Beavis 1988, 162, for ancient references.

33 Cf. Mann 2017, 302–306; Avdoulou 2020, 128. For a reference in Aristophanes which explicitly associates eagles with (kings in) tragedy, see Ar. *Av.* 511–515.

as to why the farmer Trygaeus immediately and exclusively associates himself with the dung beetle, rather than the eagle.[34] The eagle is, furthermore, associated with the serious genres of heroic epic and tragedy, while the protagonist of *Pax*, as his name Trygaeus suggests, represents the genre comedy (which Aristophanes often refers to as τρυγοδία). This contrast between the two dramatic genres becomes clear already in the first scene of the play, when Trygaeus' daughter warns him not to fall off and plummet to a tragic death like Bellerophon from Euripides' tragedy (Ar. *Pax* 146–148). When his daughter doubts that this κάκοσμον ζῷον ("stinky creature", Ar. *Pax* 132) could indeed make it to the gods, Trygaeus expands: ἦλθεν κατ᾽ ἔχθραν αἰετοῦ πάλαι ποτέ, | ᾧ ἐκκυλίνδων κἀντιτιμωρούμενος ("It went there, once upon a time, bearing a grudge against the eagle, and got revenge by rolling eggs from its nest.", Ar. *Pax* 133–134). In this way, the reference to the fable is made perfectly clear.

This passage is followed by a few more jokes from Trygaeus about beetle-related names for a ship-type, some place names and a panicked plea to the stage-crane-operator to be careful (Ar. *Pax* 174), when he makes them descend to the ground (which the audience is now supposed to imagine as heaven). Aristophanes gets all the humour he can out of his dung beetle fable allusion.

This is the most extensive beetle-scene in Aristophanes, but it focusses mostly on the humour of having a giant flying dung beetle stage prop in use and any excrement-related humour, which Aristophanes can possibly squeeze out of it. The fable is only briefly and partly alluded to, though we receive more information than in *Vespae*, as the dispute and the nature of the dung beetle's revenge on the eagle are at least mentioned. The fable reference makes it clear that Trygaeus has chosen a beetle to take him to the gods because its fable counterpart was so successful to elicit a reaction from Zeus. Unlike in *Vespae*, the focus here is not on the revenge aspect of the fable, but on the best way to reach the king of the gods, both in terms of transportation and of getting his attention. Trygaeus is as annoyed and determined as the beetle in the fable. He never actually meets Zeus in the play, but some other gods involved in the war, and he manages to free the goddess Peace, so he does achieve his goal, just like the beetle did.

Aristophanes cleverly uses the dung beetle imagery and stage prop to draw the audience into the humorous atmosphere of his comedy right from its start, with jokes on a variety of topics related to dung beetles as a species and their unusual habits of dung-eating and -rolling, including scatological humour and beetle-puns. In addition, there are numerous jokes on the beetle's role in Aesop's fable and the spoof on both the mythological creature Pegasus and Euripides' tragedy in which it

34 On fable telling and social class in *Vespae*, see Rothwell 1995, 233–254.

takes Bellerophon for a flight — though, in Euripides' play, this happened behind the scene, not literally, as in Trygaeus and his dung beetle swinging from the μηχανή. Whereas Euripides' Bellerophon falls off his noble steed and is crippled,[35] Trygaeus safely travels to heaven on his lowly dung beetle; and the comic hero has success in his endeavour to restore peace to Greece. So, the dung beetle and its fable help underline the difference between tragic Bellerophon and comic Trygaeus: No noble background nor a fancy means to reach the gods are important to achieve one's goals, but what counts are cleverness, determination, and one's imagination.[36]

3.3 *Lysistrata*

Lysistrata, like *Pax*, is a play about the wish to end the Peloponnesian War. In this play, the female protagonist Lysistrata leads the women of both Athens and Sparta in a sex-strike with the aim to force the men to stop the fighting. The fable of the dung beetle and the eagle is referenced by the Chorus of the Older Women during a heated confrontation with the Men's Chorus on the Acropolis, when both sides are preparing for a physical fight (which, however, is averted by the arrival of Lysistrata herself, seconds after). The Women's Chorus warns the men: ὡς εἰ καὶ μόνον κακῶς ἐρεῖς, ὑπερχολῶ γὰρ, | αἰετὸν τίκτοντα κάνθαρός σε μαιεύσομαι ("If you so much as curse at me, I'll boil over with such rage, I'll be the beetle midwife to your eagle's eggs.", Ar. *Lys*. 694–695). Here the eagle's eggs stand for the men's

35 This would have been told to the audience in a messenger speech; Olson 1998, xxxiv.

36 The beetle is mentioned one more time later on, when Trygaeus wants to ride it home but is unable to find it. Hermes tells the comic hero that the dung beetle has found a new position in heaven, pulling Zeus' chariot (Ar. *Pax* 723). This line, once more, quotes and parodies Euripides' *Bellerophon* (*Beller*. *fr*. 312), replacing Pegasus with the giant dung beetle. Trygaeus is wondering how it will find food in heaven. It is assumed here that the gods do not produce any excrement, even though Dionysus at *Ranae* 479 is shown to soil himself in fright. Trygaeus learns that his dung beetle is now feeding on Ganymede's ambrosia (Ar. *Pax* 724) — the joke being that this is the waste product when a human, like Ganymede, digests the food of the gods.
The reason why Trygaeus cannot just fly his beetle home seems to be both practical and mytho-religious. For one, the stage crane would have been unable to carry three people, that is Trygaeus, and the two goddesses Harvest and Holiday, whom he is planning to take home with him to celebrate the new-found Peace/peace. Just as importantly, in stories involving a human entering heaven, his means of transport must be destroyed after his departure, for the divine realm to stay inviolable by humans and the hero's visit to the gods to be truly exceptional. See Olson 1998, *ad Pax* 721–722. This does, however, not happen in *Aves*, where Peisetaerus, even when he has become the highest god, keeps his wings. Here the divine realm has been taken over by a human (or rather human-bird hybrid) character and Zeus has been dethroned. Heaven, in this play, is not inviolable.

testicles which the women threaten to crush.[37] The reference of midwifery is ironical, as the dung beetle did not help deliver the eagle-chicks but killed them all systematically. It was a women's-only profession, so it fits both, women voicing their anger as well as the context of sex and reproductive ability overall.

In *Lysistrata*, the focus is on the beetle's destructive actions, breaking the eagle's eggs. The message to the men is: you cannot escape the wrath of someone as angry as us. Here gender plays an important role, fitting the overall theme of the play. While in the fable two male animals are in conflict, in Aristophanes' play females threaten males and they do not act out their threat. The main point of the fable used in this context is that physically weaker creatures are able to defeat physically stronger ones, if they are angry and determined enough.[38] In this sense, beyond this particular scene, the fable may refer to the entire play where the women win through their cleverness over the men, who try to stop them with brute force, just like the clever dung beetle who defeats the much stronger eagle in the fable.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, a fable about an insect that lends itself so perfectly to the humour typical for Aristophanes seems to have been just too irresistible for the poet to not use several times. As we have seen, the same fable is employed with a different focus in each comedy: In *Vespae*, Philocleon turns the tables on his son: like the dung beetle, he gets what he wants (the freedom to be and enjoy himself) and enacts his revenge for having been detained. The focus here is on the two characters' role reversal, reversing the stereotypes of old and young. This change of roles is cleverly emphasized through the use of this fable, in that here Philocleon identifies himself with the beetle who is tricking Zeus, whereas earlier in the play, he considered himself similar to Zeus in his role as a juror. In *Pax*, the beetle serves (literally) as a

37 See Henderson 1987 and Sommerstein 1990, *ad Lysistrata* 795. Pertsinidis 2009, 218 has convincingly refuted Rothwell's 1995, 243 claim that the fable is used to lower and coarsen the discourse of the women at this point.

38 Henderson's interpretation that the women's threat (in the lines just before this passage) to knock out the men's teeth so they will not be able to chew beans anymore marks them as jurors (Henderson 1987, *ad Lysistrata* 693) and Rothwell's 1995, 246, conclusion that this shows that fables are appropriate to be used in the law court (see also Arist. *Rh.* 1394a5–8), seem over-interpretations to me. Chewing beans is more likely to just characterize old men in general. I do agree with Rothwell's 1995, 254 point that in court "telling a fable would be a natural way to illustrate a point without sounding like a snob", a kind of "popular, non-aristocratic rhetoric" which is used in this play, among other things, to help create the atmosphere of a "parody of court-room practice".

comic means of transport, to comment on the rivalry of tragedy and comedy, as political allegory and, of course, to make numerous jokes on the beetle's unsavoury feeding habits. In *Lysistrata*, the focus is on the beetle's destructive power and its successfulness, even though it seems weaker than its opponent. Here gender plays an important role. All three plays tellingly have in common that the speakers associating themselves with the dung beetle emerge eventually as winners, and they achieve this by using the same fable in very different, clever, imaginative and, most importantly, humorous ways.

It makes sense that Aristophanes' comedies allude to fables so frequently, not only because the playwright could count on his audience knowing these stories but also because both genres, comedy and fable, share important traits: Both genres tell clever stories (often involving animal- or animal-like characters or animal imagery) which the audience is required to decipher in order to understand their deeper meaning and humour. Both genres promote a simple lifestyle, tradition and common sense. Both employ protagonists we can identify or sympathize with and clever solutions to some complex human problems. Both genres make us think and smile.

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Ursula Gärtner

Comedy in Phaedrus' Fables: *seruus, meretrix, anus, iuuenis, miles in fabula*

Abstract: That fable and comedy can be brought into contact is certainly not surprising. Already in early Greek comedy there are clearly marked references to fable. Here we will ask what references to comedy can be found in Latin fables and what functions they assume. An investigation of all fables under this aspect would be a large undertaking more suited to a book project, so the investigation here is limited to Phaedrus and to a rather cursory overview of the following aspects: 1. the use of metre, 2. general references to theatre, 3. the characters (*seruus*, *meretrix*, *anus*, *iuuenis*, *miles*) and scenery and, finally, 4. questions will be asked about laughter, the Saturnalian aspect of the genres, and the metapoetic statement made by the references.

1 Introduction

That fable and comedy can be brought into contact is certainly not surprising. References to fable are already clearly marked in early Greek comedy.[1] Here we will consider the opposite perspective and ask not only what references to comedy can be found in Latin fables, but what functions they assume. The genres are connected from the outset through their shared relationship with satire and iambus. Horace famously puts satire in the same line of descent as ancient comedy, whose representatives *Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae* ("the poets Eupolis, Cratinus and Aristophanes",[2] Hor. *Sat*. 1.4.1) used great frankness to brand those who deserved it because they were bad. According to Horace, the satirist Lucilius followed them closely, changing only the metre and rhythm (*Sat*. 1.4.6–8). Of course, Horace also emphasizes that *ridentem dicere uerum* ("to tell the truth with a laugh", *Sat.* 1.1.24) must avoid exposing names (*Epist*. 1.19.23–31), unlike in iambus. The proximity of Phaedrus' fables to the satires of Horace has been emphasized all too often, especially due to Phaedrus' similar statement of his aims in the first prologue: *risum mouere* and *consilio monere* ("to raise laughter" and "admonish with advice",

1 Cf. Adrados 1999, 240–286; Hall 2013, 277–297; Pütz in this volume.

2 All translations of ancient or modern authors are mine.

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1 *prol.* 3–4 Z. [= G.]).[3] But, besides this resemblance between comedy and fable via satire, other clear references to comedy can be identified in fables. To investigate all fables under this aspect would be a large undertaking more suited to a book project, so the investigation here will be limited to Phaedrus, the *Palliata*[4] and to a rather cursory overview of the following aspects: we will take a look 1. at the use of metre; 2. at general references to theatre; 3. at characters and scenery; and, finally, 4. questions will be asked about laughter, the Saturnalian aspect of the genres, and the metapoetic statement made by the references.

2 *hanc ego poliui uersibus senariis*: the metre

As Phaedrus himself points out, he has chosen the iambic senarius as his metre;[5] he has polished Aesop's material with it: *hanc ego poliui uersibus senariis* ("This [= the Aesopic material] I have polished up with senarian verses", 1 *prol.* 2 Z. [= G.]).[6] But the choice of metre fits into the poetological programme of playful confrontation with Roman-Callimachean ideals.[7] For, at first, the choice of the iamb appears to be a reference to Archilochus and, especially, to Callimachus and his Μουσέων πεζὸς νομός ("the pedestrian pasture of the muses", *Aet*. *fr*. 129.9 A. [= 112.9 Pf.]), which influenced the satire of Lucilius and Horace (cf. Hor. *Sat*. 1.4.40–62; 2.6.17: *Musa pedestris* ["the pedestrian Muse"]).[8] Yet the choice of the senarius in place of the iambic trimeter seems to add irony to this reference (as is admittedly fitting), because, just as the fable was disdained, so the senarius is at the bottom of the hierarchy of

3 Cf. e.g. Renda 2012, 13–72; Champlin 2005, 117–120; Hawkins 2014, 132–133; Park 2017, 146–231. In the following Phaedrus' fables are quoted from Zago 2020 [= Z.]; any alternative numbering refers to the edition of Guaglianone 1969 [= G.].

4 The fact that we limit ourselves here primarily to the Roman comedies is not only due to the limited scope of the paper. It is less about source research than about intertextual references. These Latin texts are much more likely to be subtexts that the Roman audience knew and recognized than parallels to Greek middle comedy, for example. This would be material for a separate study.

5 The findings here are quite obvious and as such have already been treated; cf. e.g. Havet 1895, 147–224; Axelson 1949; Pighi 1954; Guaglianone 1965; Korzeniewski 1970; Barabino 1981; Currie 1984, 506–507; Baeza Angulo 2011, LIII–LXII.

6 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 60–62.

7 For my thoughts on Phaedrus' *lusus poeticus*, cf. Gärtner 2007, summarized in Gärtner 2015, 41–47; in English: Gärtner 2017a.

8 Cavarzere 2001, 210, called the choice of the senarius an "oxymoron".

important metres.[9] Finally, one may wonder why the poet explicitly names the metre (1 *prol.* 1–2 Z. [= G.]):

> Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit,
> hanc ego poliui uersibus **senariis**.
> (Phaed. 1 *prol.* 1–2 Z. [= G.])

> The material that Aesop, the author, found, this I have polished up in **senarian** verse.
> (Transl. U.G.)

The reason is revealed to the recipient while reading. The emphatic *senariis* at the end of the line is probably meant to stress its typically Roman character. Further, the poet most likely chose this metre in the tradition of the spoken verse of Plautus and Terence, since its flexibility brought it particularly close to the spoken language and so also to colloquial conversation.[10] At the same time, the opening word of the poem, *Aesopus*, belongs to the Greek sphere, so with the closing word of the first sentence we have arrived in Rome; this is certainly a reference to the juxtaposition of Greece and Rome that will be found in the prologue to Book 2. The background to the two introductory lines is, of course, the principle of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, which guides how Roman authors understood themselves in relation to their Greek models. It is not easy to assess this here: at first glance, the successor seems to be bowing to his model; but, viewed more critically, it could be thought that he is claiming to present 'Callimachean' verse in Roman dress, in contrast to a collection of prose material; yet the choice of the iambic senarius instead of the iambic trimeter, as mentioned above, adds irony to this claim at the same time.[11]

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9 Cf. Glauthier 2009, 262: "Due to its iambic nature, the senarius seems to have been the least noble of verses, laden with the connotations of comedy, mime, prose and conversation. To polish Aesopic prose in senarian verse is almost not to polish it at all. We should read the ironic combination of elevated stylistic vocabulary with less than elevated metrical practice as a programmatic sign of Phaedrus' fundamental 'ignorance' or 'misinterpretation' of Roman Callimachean ideals".

10 The first two verses of the poem itself are an example of how word and verse accent coincide; cf. Fritsch 1990, 221: "So ergibt sich gleich zu Beginn der Eindruck einer vollkommenen Einheit von prosaisch überliefertem Erzählstoff und der poetischen Kunst des Phaedrus" ("Thus the impression of a perfect unity of prosaically transmitted narrative material and the poetic art of Phaedrus arises right at the beginning"); cf. also Cavarzere 2001; Gärtner 2015, 54–55.

11 Cf. Bernardi Perini 1992, 45: "Il livello del proprio intervento viene affermato da Fedro secondo i canoni della poesia augustea, che pregiano l'*ars* non meno dell'*ingenium*: se è vero che a Esopo spetta il merito che è di ogni *inventor*, però la sua *materia* sarebbe rimasta incondita e rude, affogata nell'inerzia della prosa, se l'artista latino non le avesse conferito la dignità del verso, la superiore vita della poesia." ("The level of his own intervention is affirmed by Phaedrus according to the canons of Augustan poetry, which value *ars* no less than *ingenium*: while it is true that Aesop

The use of the senarius itself is less free than in early Roman poetry, however. In contrast to the early poets, Phaedrus no longer uses iambic shortening and is much less likely to use resolutions, though he does allow a longum or double shortening in the second and fourth anceps. Horace had criticized the latter, especially in Ennius.[12] Nonetheless, Phaedrus plays with the metre in a masterly way. Not only does he lapse into iambic trimeter for his Medea prologue,[13] for example, but he also deliberately uses caesurae and the distribution of longa and resolutions to support the statements.[14] In this respect, the inherently 'lower' form of the iambic senarius is again 'polished up' in a Hellenistic way compared to the Callimachean iambus.

When we recall that the iambic senarius is a verse form that is particularly typical of Roman comedy, the choice and execution of it become even more important, as these spoken verses have a special function in comedy, especially in the role of the clever slave — and also of the wise old man.[15] A reference to comedy is hence certainly one of the functions of the choice of metre.

deserves the merit that is every *inventor*'s, however, yet his *materia* would have remained unfounded and rude, drowned in the inertia of prose, if the Latin artist had not given it the dignity of verse, the superior life of poetry.") — Cf. Cavarzere 2001; Glauthier 2009, 262. It has already been said above that this refers to the Callimachean Μουσέων πεζὸς νομός ("the pedestrian willow of the muses", *Aet. fr.* 129.9 A. [= 112.9 Pf.]). Note that in Callimachus we read this in the epilogue of his *Aitia*, but here in the work's prologue, so Phaedrus is playing with beginnings and endings. Cf. Zetzel 1983, 261: "it seems to be a convention of Alexandrian and neoteric poetry to reverse beginnings and ends"; thus, the reference to the Callimachean verse metre almost becomes Alexandrian twice over.

12 Cf. *Ars P.* 251–262, esp. 259–262: *et Enni* | *in scaenam missos cum magno pondere uersus* | *aut operae celeris nimium curaque carentis* | *aut ignoratae premit artis crimine turpi* ("He pursues verses of Ennius thrown on the stage with great force with scolding accusation either of too hasty and careless work or of ignorance of the art.").

13 5.7.6–16 Z. [= 4.7.6–16 G.]; the 'incorrect' lengths there can be explained as deliberate 'emphases'; cf. Gärtner 2017b, 47–48. — It is this poem, in which Aesop appears on high cothurns, that provided the quotation for the conference theme: *et in coturnis prodit Aesopus nouis* (5.7.5 Z. [= 4.7.5. G.]), see introduction, 9–11.

14 Cf. Korzeniewski 1970.

15 Cf. Moore 2012, 174–177; Mann 2021, 205–206 n. 13: "Since Phaedrus later connects fables with slavery in his third prologue, it is possible that this allusion to senarii is a reference not just to Roman comedy, but to comic slaves in particular."

3 *et in coturnis prodit Aesopus nouis*: general references to the theatre

Some of Phaedrus' fables make direct references to the theatre, just some of which I pick out here. Already in 1.7 Z. [= G.] a fox finds a theatre mask, though it is expressly a tragic mask. In my view, this short poem is highlighting its cheerful distinction from that genre, which appears pompous and distant from life while failing to deliver a message.[16] In 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.], the irritated fable author has Aesop, wearing *coturni*, appear to a know-it-all critic and recite the beginning of a Medea tragedy — a comic image in itself. The poem, among other things, wittily belittles tragedy,[17] a motif already popular in ancient literature.[18] Finally, in 4.2 Z. [= 5.1 G.], one of the main representatives of New Comedy, Menander, appears *in propria persona*. This too is a rather critical examination of another genre, in my view. Menander may seem to be an independent and bold poet who demonstrates his disdain for the ruler, yet it becomes clear that his appearance, which is to be understood as that of a homosexual, does not match the image usually derived from his works, which were valued highly not only from an aesthetic but also from an ethical and moral point of view.[19] Moreover, the performative participation of the poets is reminiscent of Aristophanes, who had the tragic poets Aeschylus and Euripides appear in *The Frogs*, for example. Finally, in 4.6 Z. [= 5.5 G.] and 5.27 Z. [= 5.7 G.], scenes from the Roman theatre of the first century CE are described, which — with their pig imitators and self-indulgent flute players — make clear that the traditional forms of tragedy and comedy had long since outlived their usefulness in Rome and that an audience whose attention was hard to retain even in Terence's time was probably receptive only to the shorter form by the time Phaedrus composed his fables. The latter genre seems an obvious solution here; but, of course, this too is playful, since Phaedrus' fable was clearly conceived as literature to be read and could only develop its performativity in the act of reading, not on stage.[20]

16 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 130–132.

17 Cf. in detail Gärtner 2017b with an extensive review of the secondary literature; for the quotation, see introduction, 9–11.

18 Cf. Gärtner 2017b, 38–39.

19 Cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.15.17–18; Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.18; 10.1.69; cf. Gärtner 2011, 239–241; 2015, 31–32; 2022, 214–216.

20 On how to situate the reception of Phaedrus' fables, see Gärtner 2015, 35–36.

4 *personae loquantur, non ferae*: the characters

It should perhaps be no surprise that we will deal with fables set in the human world. The extent to which allusions to comedy might be found in animal fables is beyond our scope here.[21] We will consider characters that could be compared to *personae* in comedies: what happens when characters from one genre appear in another?

4.1 *seruus*

The most striking character in our context is certainly the clever slave. Slaves appear several times in Phaedrus' fables.[22] We will not pursue the vexed question of whether Phaedrus himself was a freedman, as claimed in the manuscripts and in much of the secondary literature.[23] It is important that, in Phaedrus' fables, it is Aesop whose intradiegetic role as a *seruus* — often combined with the role of a *senex* — is emphasized.[24] And it is interesting that obvious references to comedy can be found in this.[25]

This is most clearly marked in fable 3.19 Z. [= G.]:

[Aesopus respondet garrulo]
Aesopus domino solus cum esset familia,
parare cenam iussus est maturius.
Ignem ergo quaerens aliquot lustrauit domus
tandemque inuenit ubi lucernam accenderet;
tum circumeunti fuerat quod iter longius
effecit breuius, namque recta per forum
coepit redire. Et quidam e turba garrulus:
"Aesope, medio sole quid cum lumine?"
"Hominem" inquit "quaero," et abiit festinans domum.
Hoc si molestus ille ad animum rettulit,

21 This would be a topic for a separate treatise and would also have to be based on the findings presented here.

22 Cf. e.g. 2.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.19 Z. [= G.]; *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; *app.* 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.].

23 On the discussion, see Gärtner 2015, 21–36, with an extensive review of the secondary literature.

24 On the significance of this presentation of Aesop for the authorial image that the reader may form of Phaedrus, see Gärtner 2022.

25 On interfigurality in Phaedrus and the special role of Aesop in it, see Park 2017.

sensit profecto se hominem non uisum seni,
intempestiue qui occupato alluserit.
(*Phaed.* 3.19 Z. [= G.])

When Aesop was the sole servant in his master's house, he was ordered to prepare the meal earlier. So he looked for fire and wandered through some houses and finally found one where he lit his lantern. Because the way had been too long for him walking around, he then took a shortcut, for he started walking back directly across the forum. And a chatterer from the crowd said, "Aesop, in the middle of the day, what do you want with the light?" "A human being," said he, "I seek." And he went home in haste. If the annoying man took this to heart, he must indeed have realized that he had not appeared as a human being to the old man, for he was mocking the busy man at an inopportune moment.

(Transl. U.G.)

Only a few points can be addressed here.[26] In the fable, Aesop appears as a character in the action, not as a fable teller.[27] From its form, it can be classed as an anecdote.[28] It is striking that Phaedrus has evidently transferred to Aesop an anecdote that otherwise concerns Diogenes.[29] The fable itself works through a contrast: only when the story seems to be over (1–7a) does the short exchange of words (7b–9) provide the 'main plot' of the fable and thus the punchline.[30]

The exposition mentions Aesop in the first word as the protagonist.[31] For the first time Aesop is introduced as a slave.[32] The contrast between him and his master is illustrated by the word order.[33] We learn no more about his master, nor is he

26 These reflections were first published in Gärtner 2021, 244–248; for further interpretations, cf. Thiele 1906, 583–584; Hausrath 1936, 87; Guaglianone 2000, 220; Oberg 2000, 155; Solimano 2005, 228–230; Baeza Angulo 2011, 82–83; Renda 2012, 50–51; Park 2017, 57–66.

27 Apart from the poetological statements, Aesop acts as narrator in the following fables: 1.2 Z. [= G.]; 1.3 Z. [= G.]; 1.6 Z. [= G.]; 5.17 Z. [= 4.18 G.]; *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.]; in the following he appears as a character in the action: 3.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.14 Z. [= G.]; 3.19 Z. [= G.]; 5.5 Z. [= 4.5 G.]; *app.* 7 Z. [= *app.* 9 G.]; *app.* 11 Z. [= *app.* 13 G.]; *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; sometimes the functions mix, since Aesop always acts in an instructive way; cf. 2.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.3 Z. [= G.]. On Aesop as a character in the fables, cf. Park 2017, passim. — After 3.3 Z. [= G.], 3.5 Z. [= G.] and 3.14 Z. [= G.] this is already the fourth fable of this kind in the third book in the transmitted order.

28 For the definition, cf. Gärtner 2015, 48 n. 195.

29 See below.

30 As an anecdote, the poem does not have to conform to the usual structure of a fable. However, it could be divided up as follows: exposition (1–2), introduction (3–7a), actio (7b–8), reactio (9), epimythium (10–12).

31 Phaedrus is clearly playing with the positioning of this name; cf. Gärtner 2021, 99 n. 73, on 3 *prol.* Z. [= G.]

32 In 2 *epil.* 1–4 Z. [= G.] and 3 *prol.* 34–37 Z. [= G.] his position as a slave was mentioned in a poetological context. He is only mentioned again as a slave in *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.].

33 On *dominus*, cf. Gärtner 2021, 51 n. 28.

important for the plot. The fact that Aesop is the only servant[34] marks the master as not rich, though this reference is needed more for reasons of narrative logic: since Aesop is responsible for everything, he is also given the task of preparing the meal (2)[35] and is therefore extremely busy. The fact that this must be done earlier (*maturius*, 2) gives the plot the necessary haste.

The next 4½ lines tell, in a condensed way, how Aesop roams through some houses in search of fire (3), finally lights his lamp (4), and takes a shortened route back (5–7a). The lines are not without wit. The recipient must infer that Aesop's own fire had evidently gone out. Key to the punchline is, of course, that Aesop 1. *hurries*, 2. *through the city*, 3. *in daylight*, 4. *with a lamp*.

In our context, it is important that the motif of getting fire from a neighbour's house in such a case is already a reference to comedy.[36] This is shown by passages such as Plaut. *Aul.* 90–92, where the miserly Euclio instructs his slave not to let anyone seeking fire into the house, so that no one will find the gold treasure, of which only he knows:

> caue quemquam alienum in aedis intro miseris. 90
> quod quispiam ignem quaerat, extingui uolo,
> ne causae quid sit quod te quisquam quaeritet.
> (Plaut. *Aul.* 90–92)

> Beware of letting any stranger into your house. So that no one can seek fire from you, I want you to extinguish it, so that there is no reason for anyone to seek you.
> (Transl. U.G.)

Or Plaut. *Rud.* 766, where the pimp Labrax threatens to burn the two girls at the altar, but can get no fire in Daemones' house:

> ibo hercle aliquo quaeritatum ignem;
> (Plaut. *Rud.* 766)

> I'll goddamn go somewhere else to get fire.
> (Transl. U.G.)

34 *familia* is used here in the usual sense of household/slaves; cf. 2.8.26 Z. [= G.]; 3.7.22 Z. [= G.]; 3.10.24 Z. [= G.]; 5.22.23 Z. [= 4.23.23 G.].

35 The *cena* was the main meal of the day, usually taken at the 9th hour, i.e. in the early afternoon from 3 to 4 pm. This indirect time-indication is important for the development of the punchline.

36 Cf. also: Cic. *Off.* 1.52: *pati ab igne ignem capere, si qui uelit* ("to let fire be drawn from the fire, if one wants it"); Enn. *fr. trag. inc.* CLXV.314 J. [= 399 V.2; 145.2 FRL]: *quasi lumen de suo lumine accendat facit* ("He acts as if he lights his light with his own light").

Beyond that, Aesop's behaviour when seeking fire could refer to the characteristic haste of the *seruus currens* of Roman comedy.[37] There are models for this already in Menander, but there the figures' task, aim, and above all haste are well-founded.[38] The figure of the slave who brings good or bad news for his master or mistress, rushes through the city, cuts through crowds, threatens people who hinder him,[39] fails to see his master at home, and, in the end, breathlessly but very lengthily reports something finds its special form in Plautus, where exaggeration almost brings the action to a standstill, all with a comic effect. In antiquity, the *seruus currens* could stand for the slave in comedy altogether.[40] Here Phaedrus seems to be deliberately picking up on this.

Admittedly, the motif is altered in the fable. The search for fire is a lengthy, roundabout affair (*aliquot*, 3; *tandem*, 4; *circumeunti*, 5; *iter longius*, 5). These facts are actually superfluous for the punchline, but they are presented in an illustrative manner.[41] In contrast to comedy, the facts are narrated directly and they are not part of the report of the *seruus currens*. With *effecit breuius* (6), the path is then shortened intradiegetically, but extradiegetically the narrative itself is cut short too. This shortening is thus actually a reversal of the motif. With Aesop, we now walk straight across the forum (6–7) — yet the city is still part of the *seruus currens* motif. The description also comes alive through the fact that the reader will think of Rome rather than Athens at latest when the forum is mentioned;[42] this mixture of Greek setting and partly Roman atmosphere is also reminiscent of Roman comedy.

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37 This has been pointed out above all by Park 2017, 58–60. — On the *seruus currens*, see e.g. Duckworth 1936; Anderson 1970; Csapo 1987. — The figure of Aesop in the *Life of Aesop* also shows traces of the *seruus callidus* and thus of the New Comedy; see Holzberg 1992, 43–51. However, the parallels presented here are more striking.

38 Think of Pyrrhias in *Dyscolus* and Daus in *Aspis*; cf. Anderson 1970.

39 E.g. Plaut. *Merc*. 115–119; *Stich*. 284–287; cf. the *parasitus currens* in *Capt*. 790–822; *Curc*. 280–298.

40 This is also clear from the fact that Plautus already has other characters take on this 'role', such as Mercurius in *Amphitryo* (984–988): *concedite atque abscedite omnes, de uia decedite,* | *nec quisquam tam audax fuat homo, qui obuiam obsistat mihi.* | *nam mihi quidem hercle qui minus liceat deo minitarier* | *populo, ni decedat mihi,* ***quam seruolo in comoediis****?* | *ille nauem saluam nuntiat aut irati aduentum senis*. ("Go away, all of you, make way and get out of my way! Let no man be so bold as to step into my way! How would it be less right for me, by Hercules, as a god, to threaten the people, if they do not make way for me, than for **the little slave in comedies**. This one reports that a ship has been saved, or the arrival of an angry father.").

41 Line 5 is striking, for example, in which the *quod*, placed far behind, and the resolution of the length into two short syllables emphasize the awkward route.

42 On the action in Athens, cf. 3.14 Z. [= G.]; cf. also 1.2 Z. [= G.], where Aesop explains their situation to the Athenians through a fable.

At this point, the anecdote begins and, after the long introduction, has an even stronger effect through its conciseness. As in other anecdotes, Aesop's 'adversary' is without a name; here he is introduced in a pejorative manner as *garrulus* (7).[43] The situation of being at the mercy of a chatterer on the way reminds us, on the one hand, of Horace's famous satire 1.9[44] and, on the other hand, of the people who obstruct the *seruus currens*.[45] For these include people with whom one gets into a dispute (*et currendum et pugnandum et autem iurgiandum est in uia* ["One must run and fight, but also quarrel on the way"], Plaut. *Merc*. 99), or who pretend to be philosophers (Plaut. *Curc*. 288–291):

> tum isti Graeci palliati, capite operto qui ambulant,
> qui incedunt suffarcinati cum libris, cum sportulis,
> constant, conferunt sermones inter se<se> drapetae,
> obstant, obsistunt, **incedunt cum suis sententiis**.
> (Plaut. *Curc*. 288–291)

> Then there are the Greeks in their cloaks, walking with their heads covered, strolling along, packed with books, with food baskets, standing around, talking to each other like runaway slaves, standing in the way, obstructing you, **harassing you with their words of wisdom**.
> (Transl. U.G.)

It is this last passage that the fable recalls, in a highly comical reversal. For the *garrulus* asks what Aesop wants with a light in the middle of the day, with the astonishment expressed through the verse structure.[46] It need not actually be taken as mockery, even if it is seen as such in the end (*alluserit*, 12); but that the question will be perceived as superfluous is anticipated by *garrulus*. Yet Aesop's behaviour might well seem absurd to an observer, as a common saying attests.[47] Only the reader knows that Aesop is not acting absurdly; given the haste with which he is travelling, an observer might merely suspect that this is not an idle endeavour. The actual

43 Cf. 3.5.2 Z. [= G.]: *quidam petulans* ("some forward man").

44 The situation is also reminiscent of 3.9 Z. [= G.], where someone makes fun of Socrates' house. On the situation of talk in the street, cf. further 2.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.14 Z. [= G.]; 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.]; *app.* 11 Z. [= *app.* 13 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; *app.* 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.]; cf. Oberg 2000, 32.

45 See above n. 37.

46 The salutation is followed by the time of day *medio sole*, separated by trit- and hephthemimeres; this is also emphasized by resolution of the length into two short syllables. Only then is the interrogative pronoun placed after it. Finally, the question is shortened; *tibi uis*, for example, should be added.

47 Cf. Cic. *Fin*. 4.29: *ut in sole* [...] *lucernam adhibere nihil interest* ("as it makes no difference [...] to use a lantern in the sun"); cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst*. 5.12.8; Sen. *Ep*. 92.5, 17; Diogenian. 6.27: λύχνον ἐν μεσημβρίᾳ ἅπτειν ("light a lamp at noon").

punchline is limited to a half-line: instead of explaining his actions, for example by saying "Our fire had gone out …", Aesop responds glibly: he is looking for a human being (9a). *hominem* is placed emphatically at the beginning of the line.[48] The narrative ends just as hastily as Aesop leaves for home (9b). *abiit* is accentuated by the resolution in the length. He exits the stage as if after a performance.

The epimythium (10–12) is written in a distinctive way that does justice to Aesop's special role. It is not formulated in general terms, as would be usual, but is related to the 'historical' situation described in the anecdote; it is then merely transferable.[49] There is a certain irony in the fact that the brilliance of the quick-witted reply in two words (9) now has to be explained at length in three lines. The *garrulus* is called a nuisance (*molestus*, 10). If he had taken this remark to heart, he would have realized that to the old man he did not seem to be a human being, since he had mocked him at an inopportune moment while he was busy. This limits the "search for a human being" (9) in a significant way. At the same time, an issue of importance for Phaedrus is raised, namely the question of appropriate wit (*intempestiue* […] *alluserit*, 12),[50] which Phaedrus claims for his fables. Two things should be emphasized: 1. a change of view is added in our fable, for here we experience live, so to speak, what otherwise happened to the slave in comedy backstage; we thus get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of reality. 2. Aesop in the fable is a *seruus currens*, but cuts the diversions short and answers the chatterer succinctly; the epimythium, on the other hand, is awkwardly long and must also deliver a message — namely to us readers — but this is again conspicuously long-winded. Thus, the fable teller himself becomes a kind of metapoetic *seruus currens*.

But things get even more complex, because the fable's interpretation is not as straightforward as it may at first seem. This becomes clear by comparing the more famous version of the anecdote.[51] In Diogenes Laertius, writing about his namesake Diogenes of Sinope, we learn that the latter, in order to provoke people, deliberately wandered around in public with a lamp and said that he was looking for a human being (λύχνον μεθ' ἡμέραν ἅψας, "ἄνθρωπον," φησί, "ζητῶ." ["He lit a lamp in the middle of the day and said, 'A human being I seek'."], Diog. Laert. 6.41).[52] It was thus

48 The contrast of *garrulus* and *homo* refers back to 3.16 Z. [= G.]; see Gärtner 2021, 223–224.

49 One could also see a reference to comedy in this, since there is no abstract instruction in comedy either.

50 Cf. 1 *prol.* 3, 7 Z. [= G.]; cf. e.g. 1.29 Z. [= G.], as an example of inappropriate joking; see Gärtner 2015, 256–261.

51 Cf. Thiele 1906, 583–584, who attempted to trace the origin of the figure of Aesop.

52 The formulation is conspicuously identical, so it probably goes back to a common source. The statement is very often found in proverbs; see n. 47; cf. Tosi 2014, 45–46. — There is also an anecdote in the *Vita Aesopi* (65–66 G) in which Aesop finds only one human being: all the people bump into

a fundamental philosophical question, since Diogenes evidently cannot find a real human being even with a lamp in daytime, but the same statement in Phaedrus' fable has become a quick-witted answer in an annoying situation. It is hence also funny that the question, which Diogenes wants to *provoke* in others ("Why do you carry a light in daytime?"), in Phaedrus' version only challenges Aesop himself to *answer*. We may also wonder if there is a joke here about Diogenes' behaviour. Firstly, it is an amusing reversal of the *seruus currens* in Plautus, who, as seen above, is delayed by Greek philosophers — a Diogenes with a lamp would have annoyed a Plautine *seruus currens* no end! Secondly, Aesop wittily quotes Diogenes just incidentally, if one leaves the chronological order aside, or Diogenes is even downgraded because the older Aesop is introduced as the actual coiner of the bon mot,[53] and, finally, Aesop has a real reason for this apparently strange behaviour. And precisely this 'important' occupation — a cook fetching fire — places the fundamental question of what it means to be human in an everyday situation, trivializing the noble claim of Diogenes in an amusing, ironic way.[54] This is reminiscent,

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a stone when entering a bath, but only one man moves it out of the way. — Already in 1.10 Z. [= G.] Phaedrus had picked up a statement otherwise attributed to Diogenes in a fable and slightly reinterpreted it; cf. Gärtner 2015, 147. Similarly, we read in 3.3 Z. [= G.] a comparable motif that was circulating about Thales (cf. Gärtner 2021, 130) and in 3.14 Z. [= G.] the motif of playing that was widespread (cf. Gärtner 2021, 205–208). It is disputed whether Phaedrus made this transfer himself or adopted an appropriate tradition; cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 130; it has repeatedly been suspected that Phaedrus drew on a collection of Chrie of Cynic origin; cf. e.g. Adrados 2000, 150; Renda 2012, 50–51; Hausrath 1936, 87, attributed the transfer to Phaedrus, but considered it unsuccessful, since the *garrulus* could draw "aus dem bittern Wort des Diogenes nur die triviale Lehre [...], daß ein richtiger Mensch einen vielbeschäftigten nicht mit unnötigen Fragen aufhält" ("from the bitter word of Diogenes only the trivial lesson [...] that a real man does not detain a busy one with unnecessary questions"). Rieks 1967, 86, thought it possible that there was an earlier attribution to Aesop, which was later "mit der künstlich aufgebauten und emporstilisierten Figur des Diogenes verbunden" ("connected with the artificially constructed and highly stylized character of Diogenes"). However, the elaboration as well as the resulting image of Aesop can certainly ascribed to Phaedrus.

53 Cf. Lévy 2011, 70–71.

54 This joking concretization of Cynic statements is obviously used on purpose by Phaedrus, for something comparable could also be found in 3.5 Z. [= G.] and 3.14 Z. [= G.]. In 3.5 Z. [= G.] Aesop is pelted with stones, which recalls a statement of Antisthenes, see Gärtner 2021, 139; in 3.14 Z. [= G.] he solves a symbolic riddle, with an actual bow, see Gärtner 2021, 207–208. Cf. Park 2017, 60: "in beiden Fabeln nimmt Aesop eine Scharnierfunktion zwischen Sprichwörtlichkeit und konkreter, manifester Form ein: Wie er in 3,14 den entspannten Bogen als Symbol für einen entspannten menschlichen Geist mitten auf der Straße ablegt und sein verwirrtes Gegenüber damit konfrontiert, [...] so tritt er hier mit einer Tätigkeit auf, die für sein Gegenüber den Inbegriff der Sinnlosigkeit darstellt, in Wahrheit aber einem einfachen und klaren Zweck dient" ("in both fables Aesop assumes a hinge function between proverbiality and concrete, manifest form: Just as in 3.14 he puts down the loosened bow as a symbol of a relaxed human mind in the middle of the road and

among other things, of Terence's *Adelphoi*, where the slave Syrus apes the strict father Demea and explains his alleged educational measures towards his fellow slaves:

> postremo, tamquam in speculum, in patinas, Demea,
> inspicere iubeo et moneo quid facto usu' sit.
> (Ter. *Ad.* 428–429)

> Finally, I command them to look into the pots, as into a mirror, Demea, and warn what is necessary to be done.
> (Transl. U.G.)

Thus the fable not only makes clear allusions to Roman comedy, above all to the motif of the *seruus currens*; but, whereas Aesop intradiegetically takes leave with philosophical brevity, the narrator extradiegetically delivers his message — in a way typical for the topos — long-windedly. And so, metapoetically, the fable could again be read as ironically commenting on itself, as a demonstration of its failure to match Callimachean *breuitas*.

Another fable in which Aesop appears as a slave should at least be mentioned. It corresponds to comedy less in its subject matter than its constellation of characters. In *app.* 15 Z. [= 17 G.], Aesop is a slave in the service of an ugly woman who spends her money on cosmetics, clothes, and jewellery; when the slave remarks that her bed will also remain empty if she saves the money, she has the *garrulus* (10) beaten. When her jewellery is stolen and she threatens to beat the slaves if they do not tell the truth, Aesop, who had just been beaten *for* telling the truth, does not feel threatened.

No such scene is documented in Roman comedies,[55] but the type of *seruus callidus*, who knows how to defend himself against his master and his fellow slaves with wit and insight, can also be seen here. Typical of comedy is the indifference, even insolence, that allows the slave to assume, at least briefly, a superior position. However, other fables, such as *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.], where Aesop advises a fugitive slave not to burden himself with guilt since he will also experience bad things without having done anything wrong, show that these are merely Saturnalia-like

confronts his bewildered counterpart with it, [...] so here he appears with an activity that represents the epitome of meaninglessness for his counterpart, but in reality serves a simple and clear purpose").

55 Here one could see parallels to the *Life of Aesop*, e.g. in Aesop's relationship to his mistress, the wife of Xanthus, or already in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, e.g. in Cario's and the young man's treatment of his older mistress.

moments, as in Roman comedy, which turn the social world upside down for a moment, but fall back into the original order *post festum*.

4.2 *meretrix*

One of the central figures of the Palliata, especially in Plautus, is the *meretrix*,[56] in the versions of the *mala meretrix*, the *bona meretrix*, and the pseudo-*meretrix*. In the context of the fable, we are interested in the *mala meretrix*, who knows how to manipulate men who are socially above her and is portrayed as greedy, arrogant and opportunistic, although not entirely unsympathetic. She is, as Auhagen rightly points out, "kein Abbild der Lebenswirklichkeit in Rom, sondern ein Zerrbild: Die raffinierte und überlegene meretrix mala ist eine literarische Figur, die ebenso wie die plautinischen Sklaven, die über ihre Herren gebieten, nur vor dem Hintergrund der saturnalischen Welt vorstellbar ist: Diese Umkehrung der realen Verhältnisse im zeitlich und örtlich begrenzten Bereich des Theaters bietet unerschöpfliches Witzpotential."[57]

The role of the *meretrices* in society had certainly changed since the 3rd and 2nd century BCE. It is striking, however, how the old *literary figure* reappears in Phaedrus' fables. These are the fables *app.* 4 Z. [= G.] and *app.* 27 Z. [= 29 G.].[58]

Let us start with *app.* 27 Z. [= *app*. 29 G.]:

Cum blandiretur iuueni meretrix perfida,
et ille laesus multis saepe iniuriis
tamen praeberet sese facilem mulieri,
sic insidiatrix: "Omnes muneribus licet
contendant, ego te plurimi facio tamen".
Iuuenis recordans quotiens deceptus foret:
"Libenter" inquit "mea lux, hanc uocem audio,
non quod fidelis, sed quod iucunda est[59] mihi."
(Phaed. *app*. 27 Z. [= *app*. 29 G.])

56 In 14 of Plautus' 20 comedies, a *meretrix* plays a central role. For a fundamental discussion of the topic, see Auhagen 2009.

57 Auhagen 2009, 282 ("not a reflection of the reality of life in Rome, but a distorted image: the refined and superior *meretrix mala* is a literary figure who, like the Plautine slaves who command their masters, can only be imagined against the backdrop of the Saturnalian world: this inversion of the real conditions in the temporally and locally limited realm of the theatre offers inexhaustible comic potential.").

58 Georgacopoulou 2014 has dealt with them in detail.

59 Here I follow the transmitted *est*; Zago reads *es*[*t*] following Ianelli.

> When an unfaithful harlot flattered a young man, and he, often hurt by many wrong deeds, nevertheless showed himself friendly towards the woman, the insidious woman said: "Even if everyone competes with gifts, I still hold you in the highest esteem." The young man remembered how often he had been deceived and said, "Gladly, my light, do I hear this voice, not because it is faithful, but because it is pleasing."
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

That there is a reference to comedy here is clear. Scholars have often seen a direct allusion to Terence's *Eunuchus* (46–206), where the beautiful Thais makes poor Phaedria do whatever she wants; although the latter is full of suspicion and fear, he gives in.[60] A significant difference seems to be that the young man here is aware of his situation; hence his answer also has a punchline; it does not sound like a tortured Catullian *odi et amo*. Moreover, in my opinion, *uox* is here not to be understood as "words"; for he knows that what the *meretrix* says is not to be taken for truth; but her "voice" sounds pleasing. The young man here has seen enough *meretrices* in comedies and remembers (*recordans*, 6):[61] he only likes to listen to such things, he no longer takes them seriously.[62]

In *app.* 4 Z. [= G.], on the other hand, there is no scene for which direct parallels can be found in Plautus or Terence:

> Mercurium hospitio contubernales duae
> illiberali et sordido receperant:
> quarum una in cunis paruum habebat filium,
> quaestus placebat alteri meretricius.
> Ergo ut referret gratiam officiis parem,
> abiturus et iam limen excedens ait:
> "Deum uidetis; tribuam uobis protinus
> quod quaeque optarit." Mater suppliciter rogat
> barbatum ut uideat natum quam primum suum;
> moecha ut sequatur sese quicquid tetigerit.
> Volat Mercurius, intro redeunt mulieres.
> Barbatus infans, ecce, uagitus ciet.
> Id forte dum meretrix ridet ualidius,
> nares repleuit umor, ut fieri solet.
> Emungere igitur se uolens prendit manu
> traxitque ad terram nasi longitudinem,

60 Cf. Men. *Thais fr.* 163–164 PCG 6.2; cf. de Maria 1987, 152; Georgacopoulou 2014, 35–37; Zago 2020, 186.

61 *recordans* therefore becomes ambiguous: the *iuuenis* remembers the actual deceptions of his *meretrix*, but at the same time — metapoetically — he remembers the role of the *meretrix* in comedy.

62 Cf. Georgacopoulou 2014, 35.

et alium ridens ipsa ridenda exstitit.
Ambae gemuerunt quod sibi exoptauerant.
(Phaed. *app*. 4 Z. [= G.])

Two women who lived together had once given the god Mercurius vulgar and filthy quarters. One of them had a little son in the cradle, the other liked the meretricious earnings. So, to give proper thanks for the service, he said, as he was about to set out and was already leaving the threshold: "A god you see; I will assign to you at once what each one desires." The mother implores that she may see her son with a beard as soon as possible; the harlot that whatever she touches may follow her. Mercurius flies away, in go the women. A bearded infant, behold, lets out his cry. When the harlot accidentally laughs too hard at this, mucus fills her nose, as will happen. As she wants to blow her nose, she reaches out with her hand and pulls the length of her nose to the ground. And she, who had laughed at another, now stands there ridiculous herself. Both lamented what they had wished for.

(Transl. U.G.)

In our context, the disgraceful behaviour of the women towards a stranger (here the shabby guest room) is important, as is the greed (especially illustrated by the desire of the *meretrix*),[63] which is a topos in the behaviour of the *meretrix*. Again, however, a kind of reversal can be discerned in the treatment of a comedy character. While the beauty of the *meretrix* usually plays a role in comedy, we know nothing about the appearance in this case, but after the punishment she is grotesquely disfigured. Whereas in comedy we are dealing with cultivated and refined women, the picture drawn here in a few strokes is rather off-putting: a dirty house, a woman who blows her nose into the palm of her hand, etc. And unlike in comedy, the *meretrix* is punished for her vulgar behaviour; it is funny that the phrase "to pull something out of someone's nose" is known in Latin for "to take money from someone";[64] the punishment now makes this obvious. Moreover, there is a subtle hint in the vulgar gesture, because the *meretrix* only wants to blow her nose, but cannot finish it; Aesop, on the other hand, gives a witty answer in 3.3 Z. [= G.], also in a coarse context,[65] and is called *naris emunctae senex* ("an old man with a blown nose", 3.3.14 Z. [= G.]), which means "of keen wit". Whereas in comedy the *meretrix* is usually triumphant and laughs at others, here she laughs at another first (13), but then becomes the object of laughter herself, both intradiegetically and extradiegetically (17).

63 But the mother also has this thought, because she will have to provide financially for her son until he has a beard, i.e. is an adult.

64 Hor. *Ars P.* 237–238: *audax | Pythias emuncto lucrata Simone talentum* ("a cheeky Pythias, who gets hold of a talent from the snuffed-out Simo").

65 He advises a man whose sheep have given birth to lambs with human heads to give his shepherds wives; for an interpretation, see Gärtner 2021, 126–131.

So, what happens when the *meretrix* steps out of comedy and into the world of fable? In *app.* 27 Z. [= *app*. 29 G.], she is unmasked as a literary figure that one no longer takes seriously but still likes to hear. In *app*. 4 Z. [= G.], she is transformed from the cultivated and shrewd character of comedy to the coarse, foolish character of everyday Roman life.[66] She becomes an object of laughter but in a completely different sense than before in comedy. One can interpret this metapoetically as a critical reading of comedies. The refined and superior *meretrix mala* as a literary character is taken out of her Saturnalian world into the brutal reality of the fable.

As an example of how subtle the references to comedy sometimes are, let us look at 3.17 Z. [= G.]. Here the gods choose trees to place under their protection. Minerva is surprised that the trees chosen by the other gods are trees without fruit; Iuppiter responds that the gods do not want to give the impression of selling honour for fruit. Minerva replies (3.17.8–9 Z. [= G.]):

> "At mehercules narrabit quod quis uoluerit,
> oliua nobis propter fructum est gratior."
> (Phaed. 3.17.8–9 Z. [= G.])

> "But goddamn it, everyone can say what they want, the olive tree is dearer to us because of the fruit."
> (Transl. U.G.)

While this fable sometimes has linguistic echoes of epic — matching the council of the gods[67] — Minerva calls out *mehercules* (8). Women who swear by Hercules are found very rarely in Latin literature, let alone goddesses; in Plautus, only slaves and *meretrices* swear by Hercules, albeit rarely.[68] In the world of fables, however, where everything is pointed, even goddesses who, like Minerva, are very much concerned with profit can swear like the *meretrices* of comedy.

66 On *app.* 4 Z. [= G.], Georgacopoulou 2014, 34, already suggested that she "manque de bon sens et de discernement juste. Elle ne devient pas finalement *emuncta*; au contraire, comme si elle s'assujettissait aux normes de la fable, elle reçoit une leçon" ("she lacks common sense and fair judgment. She does not finally become *emuncta*, on the contrary, as if she submits to the norms of the fable, she is taught a lesson").

67 For an interpretation of the fable, see Gärtner 2021, 227–234.

68 Cf. a whole chapter in Gell. *NA* 11.6: *quod mulieres Romae per Herculem non iurauerint neque uiri per Castorem* ("that in Rome women did not swear by Hercules and men not by Castor"), Plaut. *Cist*. 52; cf. Stockert 2004. — The interaction among the gods here is similarly 'human' to that in 5.12 Z. [= 4.12 G.].

4.3 *anus*

The next comic character I want to examine is the old woman (*anus*). Fable 3.1 Z. [= G.], about the old woman who sees an empty amphora lying around and can still smell the remains of Falernian wine from the distinguished shard, says at the end: "*O suauis anima, quale te dicam bonum | antehac fuisse, tales cum sint reliquiae*!" ("O sweet breath of soul! How good you once were, I could say, since your remains are like this!", 5–6). This is followed by the tricky epimythium: *Hoc quo pertineat dicet qui me nouerit* ("To what this refers, he who knows me will say", 7). Elsewhere I have shown how the reader is seduced into referring the interpretation to the 'I' who speaks in the poem and the completely different interpretations that have been presented.[69] While at that time I tended to see this fable as referring to itself in a self-reflexive way, if at all, it is worth considering in our context whether there is an allusion to comedy as well, if one adds passages such as this, from the Middle Comedy of Euboulos (*fr*. 43 Kock):

> ὦ γαῖα κεραμί, τίς σε Θηρικλῆς ποτε
> ἔτευξε κοίλης λαγόνος εὐρύνας βάθος;
> ἦ που κατειδὼς τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
> ὡς οὐχί μικροῖς ἥδεται ποτηρίοις
> (Eub. *fr*. 43 Kock)
>
> Oh, potter's earth, what kind of Thericles once formed you and widened the depth of your hollow side? Yes, of course one that knew the female nature, that she does not rejoice in small cups.
> (Transl. U.G.)

Or from Roman comedy Plaut. *Curc*. 76–81, where the young Phaedromus and his slave Palinurus talk about an old female drunkard who is then lured out by the smell of wine (96–98):[70]

> anus hic solet cubitare custos ianitrix,
> nomen Leaenae est, multibiba atque merobiba.
> Pal. Quasi tu lagoenam dicas, ubi uinum Chium
> solet esse. Phaed. quid opust uerbis? uinosissima est;

69 Gärtner 2018, 268–271; 2021, 115–120; 2022, 61–65.

70 Cf. also *Cist*. 149: *utrumque haec, et multiloqua et multibiba, est anus* ("She is both, a frequent speaker and frequent drinker, this old woman"); Ter. *An*. 228–232; cf. the proverb: Lucil. 766 K. [= 767 M.]: *anus rursum ad armillum* ("the old lady back at the wine jug"); cf. Apul. *Met*. 6.22.1; 9.29.1. It is interesting to compare the funerary epigrams on female drunkards by Antipater of Sidon and Leonides, which may have been known to Phaedrus (*Anth. Pal.* 7.353 and 455); the point of each is that the dead woman sighs that the cup on her tomb is empty.

eaque extemplo ubi <ego> uino has conspersi fores, 80
de odore adesse me scit, aperit ilico;
...

(Plaut. *Curc*. 76–81)

An old woman, a guard, a gatekeeper, usually sleeps here. Her name is Leaena, a frequent drinker and wine drinker. *Pal.* Like when you name a bottle with Chian wine inside. *Phaed.* What need for words? She is a very heavy wine drinker. As soon as I sprinkle these doors with wine, she will know I am there by the smell, she opens immediately; ...

(Transl. U.G.)

Leaena flos ueteris uini meis naribus obiectust,
eius amor cupidam me huc prolicit per tenebras.
ubi ubi est, prope me est. euax, habeo;
...

(Plaut. *Curc*. 96–98)

Leaena. The blossom of old wine reached my nose, love for it eagerly lured me out here through the darkness. Where, where is it? It is near me. Yay, I have it; ...

(Trans. U.G.)

The drunken old woman may reflect reality, but she was also a subject of the visual arts. The statue-figure of a drunken old woman from Hellenistic times is well known;[71] here the strong realism is striking, which must have been much more noticeable in the Hellenistic original than in the Roman copies.[72] Zanker rightly emphasized that the Hellenistic figure must also be set within the cultural discourse:[73] "es scheint, als habe der Künstler bei seiner Charakterisierung eher die Komödiengestalt und die Topoi der kunstvollen Epigramme ins Bild zu setzen versucht als zu einer akuten gesellschaftlichen Problematik Stellung zu nehmen, so pointiert und kunstvoll sind die einzelnen 'Zitate' herausgestellt"; he was referring here above all to the topos of the once wealthy hetaera.

In this way, the fable could also be read metapoetically: the beautiful, clever *meretrix* of Latin comedy has now descended even further and can be seen in the fable at her lowest level. A tang of her former literary presence can still be grasped, however — and in the same way that a tang of comedy still hangs around the fable of Phaedrus: a presence still felt by a connoisseur, yet irretrievably gone.

71 Two Roman marble copies have survived (Capitoline Museum, 1st century CE; Munich Glyptothek, 2nd century CE).

72 Cf. Zanker 1989, 12–14.

73 Zanker 1989, 32–42, here 33 ("it seems as if the artist in his characterization tried to portray the comic figure and the topoi of the artistic epigrams rather than to comment on an acute social problem, so pointedly and artistically are the individual 'quotations' displayed").

4.4 *iuuenis*

The *iuuenis* of comedy is also found in Phaedrus' fables. In *app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.] we observed that he had seen enough comedies to react with serenity towards a *meretrix*. We should also mention *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.]. Here we are first told that the son of the house, barely out of sight of his father, is acting out his youth by beating up slaves. Then Aesop appears and tells the *senex* a fable: someone teams an old ox with a young bull under the same yoke in order to tame the young bull. The fable ends with a lengthy conclusion by Aesop and an additional epimythium (12–15):

> Et tu nisi istum tecum assidue detines
> feroxque ingenium comprimis clementia,
> uide ne querela maior accrescat domus."
> Atrocitati mansuetudo est remedium.
> (Phaed. *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.])

> If you do not always keep this one with you and appease his wild mind with clemency, then take care that your house does not suffer even greater lamentation." For wildness, gentleness is a remedy.
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

Again, there is no exact equivalent to this fable in a comedy. However, I think the relationship to Terence's *Adelphoe* is worth considering. For this comedy is explicitly about education, whereby a mild upbringing is contrasted with a strict one. Due to the unexpected twist at the end of the play, it is disputed whether one, and if so which, form of education should be understood as correct. Aeschinus, a *iuuenis*, kidnaps a girl from a pimp whom he has beaten up; his adoptive father Micio had advocated a mild upbringing based on understanding. This education seems to have failed. We learn, however, that Aeschinus had kidnapped this girl only for his brother Ctesipho. The latter was brought up very strictly by their common biological father Demea. But then it is revealed that Aeschinus has got another girl pregnant; Micio, his foster father, is deeply disappointed that he did not turn to him with his problem but forgives him because the boy has shown himself to be decent to the girl's family. So far, one thinks that Micio's parenting style, though flawed, ultimately stands the test of time. But then Demea claims to have changed so that the sons will love him too. In the end Micio has to accept all sorts of things, even his own marriage to the bride's mother, while the sons gladly agree to be advised by Demea (992–995):

> sed si [id] uolti' potiu', quae uos propter adulescentiam
> minu' uideti', magis inpense cupiti', consulitis parum,

haec reprehendere et corrigere me et [ob]secundare in loco,
ecce me qui id faciam uobis. Ae. tibi, pater, permittimus: 995
(Ter. *Ad.* 992–995)

But if you would rather that I rebuke and correct, and even at times help, what you because of your youth see less, desire more fiercely, consider too little, see me here who will do this for you. *Ae.* We entrust ourselves to you, Father.

(Transl. U.G.)

In the fable, the image of the yoke as an example of how to educate someone through *clementia* may seem surprising. Against the background of the *Adelphoe*, however, I think it becomes clear that in the end the dispute that filled an entire comedy is simply decided here in a short fable: neither Demea nor Micio really emerge as winners; meaningful education is only possible in a combination of the yoke, i.e. severity, with clemency. And what genre could unite this better than the fable?[74]

4.5 *miles gloriosus*

One last character should be allowed to enter our fable stage: the *miles gloriosus*. He appears in 4.3 Z. [= 5.2 G.]. There are no direct parallels to this fable; it seems to originate in Phaedrus.

Two soldiers encounter a robber; while one flees, the other bravely defends himself. Then we read:

Latrone occiso timidus accurrit comes
stringitque gladium, dein[de] reiecta paenula 5
"Cedo" inquit "illum; iam curabo sentiat
quos attemptarit".
(Phaed. 4.3.4–7 Z. [= 5.2.4–7 G.])

74 Specifically on educational issues, cf. 3.8 Z. [= G.]; on the subject, cf. Sen. *Dial.* 4.18–21 on *iracundia*. Here the effect of a pedagogue is described (4.21.9): *pertinebit ad rem praeceptores paedagogosque pueris placidos dari: proximis adplicatur omne quod tenerum est et in eorum similitudinem crescit; nutricum et paedagogorum rettulere mox adulescentium mores* ("It will contribute something to the cause to give the boys mild teachers and pedagogues. Everything that is still tender closely follows the next ones and develops similarly to them as it grows up. The character of the adolescents soon mirrors the character of the nurses and pedagogues."). In my view, however, the old ox is not necessarily to be equated with an educator.

> After the robber had been slain, the timid companion hurried over and drew his sword, then he threw back his cloak and said: "Bring that one over here! I will make him feel whom he has attacked."
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

Before the real action begins, *latrone occiso* (4) summarizes the consequence of the brave soldier's act. The appearance of the cowardly soldier after the penthemimeres immediately seems ridiculous due to the contrast between *timidus* (4) and *occiso*. It remains unsaid, but can be assumed that the coward was watching the fight from a distance and is only now returning. The haste (*accurrit*, 4) is metrically underlined by the resolution of the longum at *timidus* and marks the feigned readiness for action. As in a theatrical performance, he performs heroic gestures — he draws his sword and throws back his cloak[75] — i.e. he poses in order to deliver a speech, which seems all the more brazen when the robber's corpse is still 'on stage', but is deliberately overlooked by the coward. In its comic distortion, it is reminiscent of the *miles gloriosus* of Plautine comedy. This is also indicated by his first word: *cedo* (6), an old imperative, which here means something like "bring it here" or "hither with it", and is found in this function above all very often in Plautus and Terence. He presumes to make sure that the robber will feel who it is that he has attacked (6–7).[76] Once again, a figure of comedy is transposed into brutal reality: for in comedy the *miles gloriosus* fights in vain for prestige or a girl, but the soldier here was in mortal danger; his behaviour thus seems all the more despicable.

The investigation of the characters could be continued, partly with the 'lower figures' such as cobblers, butchers, and the like in the Palliata, or historical figures such as poets,[77] Socrates,[78] or personifications such as Plutus[79] in Old Comedy. It would also be interesting to see to what extent transfers to animal fables can be established.

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75 The expression *reiecta paenula* is also found in Cic. *Mil.* 29; cf. Zago 2020, 98. The fight scene there may serve as a background in general.

76 *sentiat* | *quos attemptarit* reminds of Ter. *Eun.* 66: *sentiet qui uir siem* ("he will notice what a man I am").

77 Cf. Ar. *Ran.*

78 3.9 Z. [= G.]; cf. Ar. *Nub.*

79 5.12 Z. [= 4.12 G.]; cf. Ar. *Plut.*

5 Conclusion: *derisor potius quam deridendus senex*. Saturnalian laughter

It would require extensive research to examine the role of laughter in both genres. Therefore, only a few thoughts may be added here at the end.

Laughter is inherent to comedy, though not necessarily to fable, but Phaedrus himself repeatedly emphasizes *ridentem dicere uerum* as one task of his fables.[80] It is important to separate what is laughed at intradiegetically, on the one hand, from what the recipient is supposed to laugh at, on the other. At least one claim can be advanced here: Roman theatre audiences may have laughed at many things but one thing seems certain: they were able to laugh boisterously because the reality on stage was fictitious and took place in Saturnalian freedom. The independent *meretrix* and the *seruus callidus* could arouse liberating or frightened laughter, depending on the status of the audience, but it was certain that they had no equivalents in the real world outside the theatre. But what about fables? Intradiegetically, there is a lot of laughter, but it is usually not liberating, cheerful laughter, but ridicule, a mocking of the allegedly nonsensical behaviour of others; not infrequently, the mockers themselves end up the object of ridicule.[81] What the recipients are supposed to laugh at or do actually laugh at, is difficult to ascertain (and not only here). I would like to pick out just one aspect: what functions does the reference to comedy fulfil? Just as the figures of comedy in the fable end up in brutal reality, laughter is also released from the Saturnalian freedom of the theatre into the entirely different communicative space of fable reading. A corresponding Saturnalian laughter would therefore probably not have been heard from a Roman reader; the world presented in the fables is simply too brutal, too realistic for that.

What is offered, however, is poetological laughter. What can and perhaps should be laughed at are the references to comedy themselves presented here. Comedy is mocked as a genre no longer in keeping with the time, and its personnel and topics are transferred to the realistic world of fables, which adds a new impulse and can prompt smiles. Since many of the fables can also be interpreted poetologically, there is always a self-ironizing wink hidden in this critical engagement with the other genre. This is perhaps most evident in the reinterpretation of the *seruus*

80 Mann 2021 has recently done some initial research on laughter in Phaedrus and emphasizes that the fables should be read as jokes with aggressive laughter. Cf. Beard 2014 on laughter in ancient Rome.

81 See, above, the *meretrix* in *app.* 4 Z. [= G.]; or a man from *Attica* in confrontation with Aesop in 3.14 Z. [= G.].

currens, which intradiegetically becomes a witty counter-conception of its theatrical model, while the fable teller once again takes way too long to get his point across to his readers. The only thing missing is for him to say: *spectatores, plaudite*.[82]

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82 Plaut. *Curc*. 929b.

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Caterina Mordeglia

Phaedrus and the Latin Mime: Preliminary Remarks

Abstract: The connection between Phaedrus' fables and the Latin mime is very close, more so than that with other literary genres that also influenced them, such as epigram. The mime author who most inspired Phaedrus was Publilius Syrus. Phaedrus shared with him a servile origin (much discussed by critics), the use of the iambic senarius — a metre not favoured by the cultured poetry of the Augustan age —, and the creation of characters that functioned as moral types. This last feature contributed to the creation of proverbs out of the work of both authors. However, it is very difficult to seek textual correspondences between the work of the two poets, due both to the lacunose tradition of Publilius' mimes and, above all, to the oral component that plays an important role in the work of both authors.

1 Introduction

Already in ancient and medieval treatises, it is emphasized that there are close links between fable and theatre, especially comic theatre,[1] starting with the constituent elements of the two genres.[2] Both are united by the dialogical and dialectical

Given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of tracking the moments of transition of Greek mime from the East to Italy (see Bonaria 1965, 1) — due also to the only partial literary tradition of the genre — the still debated possible influence of the literary mime of the Greek Herodas on Latin poetry of the first half of the 1st century BCE (see Di Gregorio 1997, xiv–xv), and, in general, the fact that the links between the textual fragments of the Greek and Latin mime still remain fundamentally doubtful (Giancotti 1967, 17–18), we have decided to limit ourselves here to exploring Phaedrus' connection with Latin mime, possibly postponing to a later specific examination that with the Greek mime tradition.

1 See in this volume the essays of Pütz and Gärtner. On Aesopic fable and Greek comedy, see van Dijk 1997, 188–229, and Morosi forthcoming. On the proverbial fable in Plautus' comedy, see Suleiman 2005, 14–15, and Zaffagno 2009.

2 On the link between the two genres, see Mordeglia 2024, 69–78, esp. 69–72.

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character of the narrative,[3] which presents facts that are mostly invented rather than real;[4] by the masking of its protagonists, which in fable are mostly non-human and hidden behind a moral allegory,[5] while in the theatre they are strongly typified on the basis of dramatic and narrative conventions; and by the short and sententious joke, which often draws on proverbs and generates them in turn.[6]

The outcome over time of such correspondences has been twofold. On the one hand, in the Middle Ages, a time of frequent contamination or even dissolution of literary genres, there was confusion between theatre authors and authors of fiction, and not only of fables; this was also promoted by a progressive loss of appreciation for classical metrics.[7] This led to the emergence of a series of texts considered by

3 See e.g. Arist. *Rh.* 1393a20, 23–29: Λοιπὸν δὲ περὶ τῶν κοινῶν πίστεων ἅπασιν εἰπεῖν, ἐπείπερ εἴρηται περὶ τῶν ἰδίων εἰσὶ. δ' αἱ κοιναὶ πίστεις δύο τῷ γένει, παράδειγμα καὶ ἐνθύμημα· ἡ γὰρ γνώμη μέρος ἐνθυμήματός ἐστιν. […] παραδειγμάτων δὲ εἴδη δύο· ἓν μὲν γάρ ἐστιν παραδείγματος εἶδος τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενομένα, ἓν δὲ τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν. τούτου δὲ ἓν μὲν παραβολὴ, ἓν δὲ λόγοι, οἷον οἱ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυκοί ("It remains to speak of the proofs common to all branches of Rhetoric, since the particular proofs have been discussed. These common proofs are of two kinds, example and enthymeme; for the maxim is part of an enthymeme. […] There are two kinds of examples; namely, one which consists in relating things that have happened before, and another in inventing them oneself. The latter are subdivided into comparisons or fables, such as those of Aesop and the Libyan"; transl. Freese).

4 See e.g. Isid. *Etym.* 1.40.1: *Fabulas poetae a fando nominauerunt, quia non sunt res factae, sed tantum loquendo fictae. Quae ideo sunt inductae, ut fictorum mutorum animalium inter se conloquio imago quaedam uitae hominum nosceretur* ("Poets named 'fables' [fabula] from 'speaking' [fari], because they are not actual events that took place, but were only invented in words. These are presented with the intention that the conversation of imaginary dumb animals among themselves may be recognized as a certain image of the life of humans"; transl. Barney/Lewis/Beach/ Berghof).

5 See e.g. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 3–7 Z. [= G.]: *Duplex libelli dos est: quod risum mouet* | *et quod prudentis uitam consilio monet.* | *Calumniari si quis autem uoluerit,* | *quod arbores loquantur, non tantum ferae,* | *fictis iocari nos meminerti fabulis* ("A double dowry comes with this, my little book: it moves to laughter, and by wise counsels guides the conduct of life. Should anyone choose to run it down, because trees too are vocal, not wild beasts alone, let him remember that I speak in jest of things that never happened"; transl. Perry).

6 On the relationship between fable and proverb, see Tosi 2022 and, with a specific focus on Phaedrus, Mordeglia 2017.

7 See e.g. Isid. *Etym.* 1.40.3: *Fabulas poetae quasdam delectandi causa finxerunt, quasdam ad naturam rerum, nonnullas ad mores hominum interpretati sunt. Delectandi causa fictas, ut eas, quas uulgo dicunt, uel quales Plautus et Terentius composuerunt* ("Poets have made up some fables for the sake of entertainment, and expounded others as having to do with the nature of things, and still others as about human morals. Those made up for the sake of entertainment are such as are commonly told, or that kind that Plautus and Terence composed"; transl. Barney/Lewis/ Beach/ Berghof), and Hugo Trimberg *reg. mult. auct.* 272–275: *Salustius et Tulius in usu modernorum* | *Non sunt et Therencius et plures antiquorum;* | *Qui quamuis docuerint instar ethicorum,* | *Non tamen in*

their authors to be products of ancient theatre, even though they probably had not been written for performance but only for reading,[8] and, conversely, to the 'recitation' of texts that were properly narrative and had no supposed model in theatre.[9] On the other hand, especially in the modern era, highly successful plays — dramas, comedies, but also musicals — have been produced on Aesopic and, in general, fable-like topics.[10]

2 Phaedrus and the Latin mime

Among the ancient fabulists, the Latin poet Phaedrus is perhaps the one who is most credited with the conception of an ambitious and refined literary project and an awareness of his own poetic worth. Given the almost total lack of knowledge of Greek in the western Middle Ages, it is mainly to him that we owe the dissemination of Aesopic motifs in the Latin West. His work therefore constitutes a privileged site in which to observe this multiform interchange between fable and theatre.

In Phaedrus' collection, the most immediate evidence of this relationship lies in the content and style, especially from Book III onwards, when he partly disengages from the generic fable *auctor* Aesop, by drawing on different models and on his own inventiveness. His fables are populated by characters from the circus and different kinds of show: boxers (5.25 Z. [= 4.26 G.]), comic poets (4.2 Z. [= 5.1 G.]), jesters (4.6 Z. [= 5.5 G.]), flute players (5.27 Z. [= 5.7 G.]). Phaedrus borrows the traditional *personae* of Comedy: old drunkards (3.1 Z. [= G.]), boastful soldiers (4.3 Z. [= 5.2 G.]), prostitutes (*app.* 4 Z. [= G.]), young lovers (*app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.]), starving slaves (*app.* 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]). From tragedy he borrows tones and situations, for example competing with the beginning of Euripides'

numero ponuntur metricorum ("Sallust and Tullius are not used by moderns, nor Terence and many of the ancients; these, although appreciated for their moral teachings, are not to be considered poets"; transl. C.M.).

8 Famous examples are the 12th-century Plautus remakes *Geta* and *Aulularia* by Vitale of Blois and *Miles gloriosus* attributed to Arnulf of Orleans. All three works are part of the corpus of elegiac comedies, published in 6 volumes under the direction of Ferruccio Bertini (Bertini 1976–1998).

9 This is the case, for instance, with the *Ecbasis captivi*, the first example of an animal epic written in the 10th century; see Mordeglia 2020.

10 We mention only *Les Fables d'Ésope, comédie* or *Ésope à la Ville* (by Edmé Boursault, Paris, 1690), *A rapôsas e as uvas* (by Guilherme Figueiredo, Rio de Janeiro, 1953), *Story Theatre* (by Paul Sills, Broadway, 1970). For more examples, see Mordeglia 2020 and 2021.

Medea, which was translated into Latin by Ennius and Accius (5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.]).[11] Less obvious on a first reading — but more deeply rooted in the inspiration and the poetic act itself — are the correspondences between Phaedrus' fable and the most popular and most frequently presented theatrical genre of his time: mime.[12]

On a formal level, the most striking evidence of Phaedrus' deliberate emulation of mime is his choice of the iambic senarius as the metre for his fables. As is well known, this metre was used in the dialogue parts of archaic theatre, but in the cultured poetry of the Augustan age it was almost systematically replaced by the iambic trimeter, which was perceived as more refined and 'modern' than the heaviness and archaic patina of the senarius. Horace's judgement of Ennius' senarius is peremptory:

> Hic [*scil.* Iambus] et in Acci
> nobilibus trimetris adparet rarus et Enni
> in scaenam missos cum magno pondere uersus
> aut operae celeris nimium curaque carentis,
> aut ignoratae premit artis crimine turpi.
> (Hor. *Ars P.* 258–262)

> In the 'noble' trimeters of Accius this *iambus* appears but seldom; and on the verses which Ennius hurled ponderously upon the stage it lays the shameful charge either of hasty and too careless work or of ignorance of the art.
> (Transl. Fairclough)

But already Cicero had criticized the senarii of the archaic comedians so severely for their closeness to speech that he did not even consider them verse:

> At comicorum senarii propter similitudinem sermonis sic saepe sunt abiecti, ut nonnunquam uix in eis numerus et uersus intellegi possit.
> (Cic. *Orat.* [55] 184)

> But the senarii of comedy are often so lacking in elevation of style because of their resemblance to ordinary conversation that sometimes it is scarcely possible to distinguish rhythm and verse in them.
> (Transl. Hendrickson/Hubbell)

Despised and neglected by the poets and prose writers of the 1st century BCE, nonetheless in Phaedrus' time the iambic senarius still found a place in popular poetry.

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11 For an in-depth look at the relationship between Phaedrus' fable and Latin theatre in general, I refer to Ursula Gärtner's contribution in this volume.

12 On the general characteristics of mime in Rome, see Zimmermann 2020, 270–276, and Panayotakis 2010, 1–30.

Traces of it remain, for instance, in epigraphic poetry,[13] especially in military circles, and in the surviving inscriptions of Pompeii,[14] which, alongside snapshots of everyday life, also contain fragments of fables and, above all, of mimes. It is most probable that this is the tradition to which Phaedrus, a freedman of Augustus and a refined poet,[15] intended to reconnect, moving away from the taste for cultured poetry of Rome in the era of Augustus and Tiberius, under whom he lived. But for what reason?

The reasons for this choice, which makes Phaedrus the initiator of that shift away from Augustan poetry inspired by Callimachus that would later lead to the archaizing taste of the 2nd century CE,[16] must be sought both in personal inclination and in the literary and cultural context in which Phaedrus operates.

Phaedrus not only espouses the narrative economy proper to the genre of the fable, but personalizes it through his biting view of reality, his portraiture skills, and, above all, his propensity for *sketching*, which moves the reader to the laughter that, together with moral teaching, constitutes the ultimate goal of his collection.[17]

Epigram[18] and indeed mime, which was composed, performed, and enjoyed above all in the milieu of the freedmen to which Phaedrus himself belonged, have similar characteristics. The language of Phaedrus, which combines rare and precious words with neologisms, Graecisms, and terms proper to popular expressions, is a composite language suitable for this rising social class — of which Petronius shortly afterwards offers us a vivid representation in the *Cena Trimalchionis* —, a class of people who frequented the cultured and liberal milieu, but who often found it difficult to forget their servile origins.[19]

Mime, therefore, is more suited to Phaedrus' sensibility than other theatrical forms. However, it also has a series of commonalities with fable, starting with the propensity for *ethopoiia* (the representation of characters) with respect to action. Cicero, when warning the good orator against abusing this resource, lest he lapse into ridiculous and obscene caricature, links this characteristic precisely to mime.

13 Bücheler 1895–1897. See also Della Corte 1958, 180–186.

14 See Panayotakis 2010, 30.

15 A critical summary, with related bibliography, of the debated question of Phaedrus' servile origin can be read in Mordeglia 2014.

16 Cf. Della Corte 1958, 180; Cavarzere 2001; Glauthier 2009.

17 See above, p. 144 n. 5.

18 On the similarities between fable and epigram, see Mattiacci 2022, 49–52 and, in this volume, Neger, Spielhofer, and Scognamiglio.

19 See Della Corte 1958, 186–187.

> In re est item ridiculum, quod ex quadam deprauata imitatione sumi solet […]. Atqui ita est totum hoc ipso genere ridiculum, ut cautissime tractandum sit; mimorum est enim ethologorum, si nimia est imitatio, sicut obscenitas
>
> (Cic. *De or.* 2.242)

> Another sort of jest depending on facts, is that which is generally derived from what may be called vulgarized mimicry […]. However this particular kind of laughing-matter is all such as to need extreme circumspection in the handling of it; for it is a matter for character-mimes, if there is too much imitation, as also with obscenity.
>
> (Transl. Sutton/Rackham, adapted)

> In dicto autem ridiculum est id, quod uerbi aut sententiae quodam acumine mouetur; sed ut in illo superiore genere uel narrationis uel imitationis uitanda est mimorum ethologorum similitudo, sic in hoc scurrilis oratori dicacitas magnopere fugienda est.
>
> (Cic. *De or.* 2.244).

> As regards words, however, the laughter is awakened by something pointed in a phrase or reflection. But just as, with the former kind, both in narrative and in mimicry, all likeness to buffoons in pantomime is to be avoided, so in this latter case the orator must scrupulously shun all buffoonish raillery.
>
> (Transl. Sutton/Rackham, adapted).

As Seneca tells us in epistle 95, the Stoic philosopher Posidonius emphasized how the description of character types is useful to represent human vices and virtues and, consequently, to point the way to wisdom:

> [Posidonius] ait utilem et descriptionem cuiusque uirtutis; hanc Posidonius "ethologian" uocat, quidam "characterismon" appellant, signa cuiusque uirtutis ac uitii et notas reddentem, quibus inter se similia discriminentur.
>
> (Sen. *Ep.* 95.65)

> He remarks that it will also be useful to illustrate each particular virtue; this science Posidonius calls "*ethology*", while others call it "*characterization*". It gives the signs and marks which belong to each virtue and vice, so that by them distinction may be drawn between like things.
>
> (Transl. Gummere)

The moral value of the individual highlighted in the *ethopoiia* takes on a universal character in the proverbial *sententia* or aphorism. Quintilian says this expressly, speaking of the definition of characters and the *sententia*, where *sententia* is understood not so much as the witticism, but rather the synonym of the Greek word *gnōmē*, i.e. precisely the proverb.[20]

20 Quint. *Inst.* 1.9.3: *sententia uniuersalis est uox, ethologia personis continetur* ("The proverb is a universal voice, while the imitation of characters concerns the character of persons"; transl. Russell);

3 Phaedrus and Publilius Syrus

If we apply these considerations to the mime and the only two major authors of it that tradition has preserved,[21] it is easy to see that the *sententiae* to which Quintilian refers can be attributed not so much to Laberius, who is more inclined to witty banter, as to Publilius Syrus.

As Seneca the Elder testifies, Publilius was much loved by young people and, especially for his moralistic tones, was read in schools of rhetoric:

> Memini Moschum, <cum> loqueretur de hoc genere sententiarum, quo infecta iam erant adulescentulorum omnium ingenia, queri de Publilio, quasi ille [iam] hanc insaniam introduxisset. Cassius Seuerus, summus Publili amator, aiebat non illius hoc uitium esse, sed eorum, qui illum ex parte qua transire deberent imitarentur, <non imitarentur> quae apud eum melius essent dicta quam apud quemquam comicum tragicumque aut Romanum aut Graecum.
>
> (Sen. *Controv*. 7.3.8)

> I remember that Moschus, speaking of this type of epigram, which had infected all the bright young men even in those days, complained of Publilius for introducing this foolish feature. Cassius Severus, a great lover of Publilius, said it wasn't his fault, but the fault of those who imitated the side of Publilius that they should have passed by, while failing to imitate things that were better put by Publilius than by any comic or tragic writer, Greek or Roman.
>
> (Transl. Winterbottom)

It is no coincidence that a collection of proverbs soon grew out of Publilius Syrus' mimes, commonly known as *Sententiae*;[22] it probably originated in the 1st century CE — the same period as Phaedrus' fables — and circulated throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. We can presume that Phaedrus must have been familiar with this collection because it circulated in schools, just like his fables and

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8.5.3: *Antiquissimae sunt, quae proprie, quamuis omnibus idem nomen sit, sententiae uocantur, quas Graeci γνώμαϛ* appellant ("Oldest of all — and properly called sententiae, though the same name serves for all types — are what are called in Greek gnōmai"; transl. Russell).

21 Cf. Zimmermann 2020, 273–274. The most recent edition of Laberius' work now includes 96 fragments, most of which can be attributed to the 68 titles preserved to us by tradition, while 26 are of unidentifiable provenance and one of dubious attribution (cf. Panayotakis 2010, 33–67). Of the mimes by Publilius Syrus, on the other hand, only two titles have been preserved, of which we are left with a total of four verses (Bonaria 1965, 78–79 and 155–156, to whom we also refer for fragments of mimes by other or unidentified authors).

22 It consists of about 700 monostichic verses. Cf. Duff/ Duff 1934 and Giancotti 1968. The epitomization in proverbs of ancient theatrical texts also occurred for other authors, both Greek and Latin, for example, in the comic field, for Menander, Plautus, and Terence (see Lelli 2011).

other collections of Latin fables in general. But he was probably also familiar with Publilius' mimes themselves, because this genre enjoyed great popularity on the Roman stage at least until the 3rd century CE, as demonstrated by the vehement attacks of the Church Fathers on the genre for its licentiousness.[23]

It is most likely Publilius, not Laberius, who inspired Phaedrus. In fact, there is no consonance between Phaedrus's text and Laberius's fragments, as evidenced also by the fabulist's absence among the names of the anticipated authors mentioned in the last editor's index of passages.[24]

Phaedrus had many things in common with Publilius, above all his presumed servile origin: Publilius was a freed slave of Syriac origin, whereas his 'rival' Laberius was a Roman knight.[25] And, unlike Laberius, whose mimes are written in various metres, Publilius chooses the iambic senarius almost exclusively. Finally, both Phaedrus and Publilius make use of *ethopoiia* for moral purposes and hence, through didactic use, their work underwent a process of proverbial epitomization through the centuries that ensured their survival. In this sense, Phaedrus' link to mime — a link that has already been highlighted for other authors of the 1st century CE such as Ovid and Petronius[26] — turns out to be closer than his link to epigram, on which recent criticism has insisted so firmly,[27] but which does not fully share the moralistic intent of the fable genre or of Phaedrus himself.

Attempts have been made to identify textual connections between the *sententiae* of Publilius and the text of Phaedrus — especially in the morals — even in fairly recent times.[28] However, it is essential to proceed very cautiously in this, for several reasons. Firstly, there is no certainty about the circumstances of composition and transmission of Publilius' text, nor of that of the other mimes. Secondly, the component of orality needs to be considered, and not only in the schoolroom, which has had a decisive effect on the transmission of Phaedrus' morals and of fables in general, but

23 See Zimmermann 2020, 274–275.

24 Panayotakis 2010.

25 On the alleged dispute between the two mimographers, see Panayotakis 2010, 45–57.

26 Cf. Fantham 1989.

27 See above, p. 147 n. 17.

28 Cf. Stocchi 2004, with other bibliographical references about the possible connections between Phaedrus and the Latin mimical tradition. Stocchi quotes all the possible textual similarity between Publilius' sentences and Phaedrus' *promythia* and *epimythia* of only one verse, by examining the possible stylistic and lexical correspondences. But in his conclusions, he too defines this imitative process as only conceivable (*Ibidem*, 412, 421).

also in the tradition of mime and in particular of *sententiae.*[29] Finally, I believe that a simplistic application of the method of intertextuality — which, when used indiscriminately, has on several occasions revealed its limitations as an approach to ancient literature — as the main criterion for evaluating Phaedrus' creative process in relation to his literary and cultural models is not adequate to his poetic genius, which is unique in the panorama of Latin, ancient, and medieval fables.

At this point, I always like to quote the classical philologist Luciano Canfora and his thought-provoking invitation to remember that in Antiquity the Library of Congress did not yet exist, despite what we are often led to think.[30] Phaedrus' cultural suggestions are so many and varied, and his literary project so ambitious, that to reduce his verses to quotations would not do him justice.

4 Conclusion

In concluding our observations in the context of the study of genre interactions inherent in Aesopic fable, what emerges is not only Phaedrus' debt to Latin theatre — already acknowledged in part by the critics and evident on both the rhetorical-structural and thematic levels — but above all his link with the Roman literary mime of the late Republic and early Imperial age.

The points of contact with this theatrical genre, so widespread and beloved by the Romans in Phaedrus' lifetime, are evident first and foremost in the common adherence to a 'popular' poetics, in the choice of metre, situations, and type characters, but also in the moral purpose proper to Phaedrus' fables, matching the compositional characteristics of the fable genre itself.

In this sense, although it is difficult and methodologically unwise to make an intertextual comparison between the two collections, given their different compositional genesis and their state of transmission and conservation, the link between Phaedrus' fables and the mimes of Publilius Syrus, of which we have traces in the gnomic-proverbial collection known as *Sententiae*, appears stronger than with those of Laberius, whose poetic inspiration was certainly less inclined to moral typification of characters.

The mime thus rightly joins the other literary genres — above all, the epigram, among the genres considered 'minor' literature — that, in a more or less intentional

29 Although Publilius' *Sententiae* can reasonably be attributed to a single author, the suspicion that interpolations and spurious verses are present in the collection cannot be ruled out (see Giancotti 1967, 338).

30 Canfora 2017.

manner, inspired Phaedrus' creative genius, contributing to the poetic value and uniqueness of his collection within the panorama of fable and Latin literature.

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Part IV: **Fable and Prose Genres**

Hedwig Schmalzgruber

Clever Creatures: How Phaedrus Parallels Natural History in His Fables

Abstract: Although Phaedrus (2nd half of 1st century CE) generally tends to humanize animals in his fables and to use them as representatives of human characters, there are numerous fables that show an interest in the physical and mental characteristics, the lifestyle and the astonishing skills of 'real' animals. Some fables merely incorporate a few realistic details about animals, while others come closer to natural history anecdotes. In my paper, I discuss five fables from Phaedrus' collection that clearly involve 'knowledge' about animals that is shared with the ancient tradition of natural history writing. While the paper is not a source-critical study, a comparison with obvious parallels in two prominent representatives of ancient natural history in the Imperial period, Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) and Aelian (2nd/3rd century CE), will show how Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in content and style, the effect of such a convergence with this other genre, and how his fables fundamentally distinguish themselves from natural history.

1 Introduction

Although Phaedrus, like other ancient fable authors, generally tends to humanize animals in a fantastical way and to use them as representatives for human characters, most of his fables are rich in details that characterize the animals as 'real' animals, referring to their physical and mental characteristics, natural environment, and lifestyle.[1] Some fables contain naturalistic details that correspond to humans' everyday experience and are not spectacular at all, while others centre on more unusual or even astonishing features of animals. These features are presented as realistic traits and behaviours and, although the modern reader may have doubts about their reality in some cases, they do not seem totally unimaginable, so the line

1 Even fables in which the animals' behaviour is strongly humanized provide a few realistic details: in Phaed. 1.26 Z. [= G.], for example, the fox keeps the stork hungry by setting a plate with thin soup before him, while the stork takes revenge by setting a narrow-mouthed jar with solid food before the fox. The punchline of such behaviour can only be understood with regard to the realistic physical traits of the animals, who cannot take in soup with a beak or extract food from a jar with a muzzle.

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between fable and natural history is blurred.[2] For we must bear in mind that ancient natural history differs considerably from what we understand by 'scientific writing' today and often incorporates material on animals that is incredible or rather fantastic from a modern point of view.[3]

In this paper, I will focus on five fables from Phaedrus' collection that stand out for their interest in 'real' animals and which all have striking parallels to two prominent works of Latin and Greek natural history writing in the Imperial period, Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* and Aelian's *De natura animalium*;[4] in one case, also, there is a parallel with Aelian's *Varia historia*, a collection of edifying tales that includes a few natural history animal anecdotes in the style of *De natura animalium*.[5] The biographical data for Pliny (23/24–79 CE)[6] and Aelian (*c.* 170–235 CE)[7] are fairly well known, but the dating of Phaedrus' work is fraught with uncertainties, as there is no reliable evidence for his life as a historical person,[8] though it is plausible that he lived in the second half of the 1st century CE.[9]

The direct comparison of Phaedrus' fables with the corresponding passages in both Pliny and Aelian offers a unique opportunity to explore how Phaedrus comes close to natural history in the Imperial period in content and style, the effect of this convergence with the other genre, but also how his fables fundamentally distinguish themselves from natural history. The focus will be on Phaedrus' convergence with natural history *as a genre*, because source-critical questions are very difficult to answer in this case[10] and will therefore not be addressed here. Likewise, the

2 On the interest of the ancient fable in 'natural history' material, see also Lefkowitz 2014, 15–18.

3 On the narrow line between ancient natural history and paradoxography and the authors' particular interest in *mirabilia*, see for example French 1994; Naas 2001; Kitchell 2015; on the influence of traditional beliefs and folklore on ancient scientific writing, see Lloyd 1983.

4 Pliny's *Naturalis historia* offers "a universal index of the world as known and imagined by the educated classes of early imperial Rome" (Murphy 2008, 671), while Aelian's *De natura animalium* is, "after Aristotle, the most important extant zoological corpus in Greek" (Zucker 2008, 33).

5 To identify these parallels, Adrados 2003, the notes in Holzberg 2018, 221–245 and the apparatus listing similia in Zago 2020 are particularly helpful.

6 Cf. Murphy 2008, 671.

7 Cf. Zucker 2008, 33.

8 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 21–33.

9 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 56, and Holzberg 2018, 13.

10 The identification of Phaedrus' sources for details of natural history is fraught with difficulties because he may have used other fable collections, writings in natural history and paradoxography, or collections of proverbs and aphorisms that are no longer extant, he may have worked in his own observations of nature, and he may even have invented some of the more unusual animal traits and behaviours himself; cf. also Gärtner 2015, 41–42. Due to his uncertain dating, we cannot be sure whether he used Pliny as a direct source or whether both used similar sources.

question whether Pliny and Aelian may in their turn have been directly or indirectly inspired by Phaedrus' fables or whether the parallels are due to common or intermediate sources is beyond the scope of this paper.[11]

2 Case studies

2.1 Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.]: The dog and the crocodile

Consilia qui dant praua cautis hominibus
et perdunt operam et deridentur turpiter.
Canes currentes bibere e Nilo flumine,
a corcodillis ne rapiantur, traditum est.
Igitur cum currens bibere coepisset canis,
sic corcodillus: "Quamlibet lambe otio,
noli uereri." At ille: "Facerem mehercules,
nisi esse scirem carnis te cupidum meae."
(Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.])[12]

Those who give wrong advice to careful people waste their effort and are disgracefully ridiculed as well. It has been handed down that dogs drink from the river Nile while running, so that they are not seized by crocodiles. Accordingly, when a dog had begun to drink on the run, a crocodile spoke as follows: "Slurp in peace as you like, don't be afraid." But the dog said: "I would do it, by Hercules, if I didn't know that you are greedy for my flesh."

(Transl. H.S.)

The drinking habits of the Egyptian dogs have clear parallels in natural history:

Certum est iuxta Nilum amnem currentes lambere [canes], ne crocodilorum auiditati occasionem praebeant.[13]

(Plin. *HN* 8.149)

11 Although Pliny names a great variety of Greek and Latin poets as his sources in the indices of his books and in the text itself, the name of Phaedrus never appears: if Pliny used Phaedrus, he did so without mentioning his name. Aelian used a wide range of Greek authors and also names many of them; it is questionable whether he would have used Phaedrus as a direct source.

12 The text of Phaedrus is based on Zago 2020; the numbers in Guaglianone's edition are given in brackets. All translations are my own. For Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], see Gärtner 2015, 232–235; Baeza Angulo 2011, 28–29; Solimano 2005, 70–71; Oberg 2000, 82–83.

13 Pliny's text is quoted according to Ianus/Mayhoff 1875–1906; all translations are my own.

> It is certain that [dogs] by the river Nile lap up water while running, so that they do not provide an opportunity for the greed of the crocodiles.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι κύνες καὶ ἐλεῖν καὶ ἀνιχνεῦσαι τὰ θηρία σοφοί, οἱ δὲ Αἰγύπτιοι φυγεῖν δεινότατοι. τὰ γοῦν ἐν τῷ Νείλῳ δεδιότας ἄγει μὲν αὐτοὺς τὸ δίψος πιεῖν, ἡσυχῇ δὲ καὶ ἐς κόρον πιεῖν τὸ δέος οὐ συγχωρεῖ. καὶ διὰ ταῦτα οὐ πίνουσιν ἐπικύψαντες, ὡς ἂν μή τι τῶν κάτωθεν ἀνερπύσαν εἶτα ἐξαρπάσῃ αὐτούς. οὐκοῦν τὴν μὲν ὄχθην παραθέουσι, λάπτουσι δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ, ἁρπάζοντες ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις ἢ καὶ νὴ Δία κλέπτοντες τὸ πόμα.[14]
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.53)

> The other dogs are clever at catching and tracking down wild animals; the Egyptian dogs, however, are most capable of running away. Thus, while they are afraid of the animals in the Nile, their thirst forces them to drink, but their fear does not allow them to drink in peace and until they have had enough. Therefore, they do not drink while bowing down, for fear that some of the animals from below might creep up and then seize them. Accordingly, they run along the riverbank and lap with their tongue, snatching, as one might say, or even, by Zeus, stealing their drink.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

The context of Pliny's very short description is a discussion of the many astonishing qualities of dogs, ranging from loyalty to high intelligence and fighting spirit. In Aelian, the immediately preceding chapter deals with the amazing intelligence of an elephant that punishes its keeper for cheating it out of its food. He reports the drinking habits of the dogs in much more detail, focusing on the dogs' deeper motivation for this uncomfortable kind of drinking and on its practical realization. Both authors use the present tense and the plural (referring to *canes* / κύνες) to mark the generalizing character of their description.

In content, it is obvious that Phaedrus shares the most important 'realistic' details with Pliny and Aelian: like them, he explains the extraordinary drinking behaviour of the Egyptian dogs as an attempt to avoid crocodile attacks; cf. *canes currentes bibere e Nilo flumine,* | *a corcodillis ne rapiantur* (3–4) with *iuxta Nilum amnem currentes lambere* [*canes*]*, ne crocodilorum auiditati occasionem praebeant* and ὡς ἂν μή τι τῶν κάτωθεν […] ἐξαρπάσῃ αὐτούς […] τὴν μὲν ὄχθην παραθέουσι, λάπτουσι δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ […] τὸ πόμα. In particular, the unusual 'lapping up' of the water is emphasized by each of the three authors (*lambe*, 6; cf. *lambere* and λάπτουσι).[15]

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14 Aelian's text is based on García Valdés et al. 2009 (*NA*) and Dilts 1974 (*VH*); all translations are my own. A very similar description is found in Ael. *VH* 1.4.

15 The lexical parallels and synonymous correspondences between Phaedrus and Pliny are striking, cf. *e Nilo flumine* (3) vs. *iuxta Nilum amnem, currentes bibere* (3) vs. *currentes lambere, traditum*

Stylistically, Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in some aspects, while at the same time retaining typical features of the fable. His fable starts with a promythium (1–2) that anticipates the 'lesson' of the following animal narrative for the human realm (*hominibus*, 1). This element is characteristic of fables, whereas in natural history the focus is not a priori on the analogy between animal world and human world but on the *mirabilia* of the animal world.[16] It is true that Aelian in his *De natura animalium* often compares and contrasts the behaviour of animals with that of humans, and concludes that animals are even superior to humans due to their technical, intellectual, and moral virtues.[17] However, these reflections never take the form of a clear 'lesson' that humans should learn from animals.

The exposition (3–4) is less typical of a fable: it does not introduce the reader into the situation of one or more individual dogs that acted sometime in the past,[18] but contains a general observation on the cautious drinking habits of dogs at the Nile that, as suggested by the present tense *rapiantur* (4), are still observable in the narrator's times. Here, Phaedrus clearly comes close to the genre of natural history, in which generalizing characterizations of animal traits and behaviours in the present tense are the default mode, as can be seen in the passages quoted above.[19] Furthermore, *traditum est* (4) seems to refer to an unspecified written tradition,[20] which in this case could be a work of natural history like Pliny's. The impersonal formula stands out from Phaedrus' usual fable style, as it occurs only here and, slightly varied, in 5.4.6 Z. [= 4.4.6 G.] *sic locutus traditur*,[21] where it does not seem to refer to a particular written tradition. Here, Phaedrus obviously employs it to underline the credibility of his report and of the following fable narrative,[22] taking up a strategy frequently used in natural history and in historical writing in general.

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est (4) vs. *certum est*, *lambe* (6) vs. *lambere*, *corcodillis* (4) vs. *crocodilorum*, *cupidum* (8) vs. *auiditati*. As Gärtner 2015, 233 n. 8 notes, it cannot be excluded that Phaedrus was inspired by Pliny here, but due to the uncertain dating of his work no definite conclusion is possible. At any rate, there seem to be no other extant texts that Phaedrus could have used as a source, neither among natural history writings nor other fables, see also Gärtner 2015, 235. For later parallels, see Solin. 15.12 and Macrob. *Sat.* 2.2.7.

16 Cf. Hübner 1984, 162.

17 Cf. Hübner 1984, 159–163; Smith 2014, in particular 101 and 111.

18 Cf. for example Phaed. 1.4.2 Z. [= G.]: ***Canis*** *per flumen carnem cum* ***ferret***; 1.19.3 Z. [= G.]: ***Canis*** *parturiens cum* ***rogasset*** *alteram*; 1.20.3 Z. [= G.]: *Corium depressum in fluuio* ***uiderunt canes***.

19 See also Lefkowitz 2014, 17–18 on Avian. 27 (the fable of the clever crow and the pitcher) in comparison with Ael. *NA* 2.48.

20 On *tradere* referring to written traditions in particular, see Georges 1913/1918, II s.v. *trado* p. 3168 under II/2/m/β.

21 "It is said that he <i.e. the rider of the horse> spoke as follows." (Transl. H.S.)

22 See also Gärtner 2015, 233–234 n. 8.

Pliny himself employs such an impersonal formula at 8.149 (*certum est*) to stress his authority, and in book 8 alone there are numerous instances of *tradere* referring to a specified or unspecified source.[23] Aelian does not refer to a specific tradition in this particular context, but in the rest of book 6 he often indicates his written or oral sources.[24]

By *igitur* (5), Phaedrus links his generalizing introduction with a supporting example of a specific dog interacting with a specific crocodile sometime in the past.[25] In accordance with the fable's general tendency to humanize animals, the two engage in a dialogue which is presented in direct speech (6–8): the crocodile tries to reassure the cautious dog and encourages it to drink in peace, but the dog refuses to do so because it knows that the crocodile wants to seize and eat it. The possessive pronoun *meae* (8) is emphasized by its position at the end not only of the verse but also of the entire text; it highlights the dog's presence of mind, as it is not distracted by the friendly words of the predator but remains focused on saving its own life. Against this backdrop, the emphatic phrase *facerem mehercules* (7) has a sarcastic overtone and seems to refer back to the promythium where humans that act like the crocodile are said to be "disgracefully ridiculed" (*deridentur turpiter*, 2).

Neither Pliny nor Aelian illustrate their general descriptions of the dogs' drinking habits with concrete examples of specific individuals in the past, but in other cases they do.[26] What clearly distinguishes fable from natural history here is the strong humanization of Phaedrus' dog and crocodile through the gift of human speech, which is particularly noticeable due to the direct speech and adds a fantastic dimension to the text. Furthermore, the crocodile is humanized through its hunting strategy, which does not consist in jumping out of the water and dragging the dog in with its jaws, but in an attempt to outwit the dog with sneaky words. Pliny

23 *Iuba tradit* and *idem* […] *tradit* (8.14); *Verrius tradit* (8.17); *Fenestella tradit* (8.19); *Aristoteles* […] *tradit* (8.44); *is ergo tradit* (8.45); *tradit Demetrius* (8.59); *Theophrastus* […] *tradit* (8.173); *Nigidius tradit* (8.205); *Aristoteles tradit* (8.229); *traditur* (8.9; 13; 51; 55; 117; 123; 155; 166); *tradunt* (8.20; 40; 58; 151; 163; 176; 186; 203; 215; 222; 227); *traduntur* (8.106; 178). *Traditum est* only occurs once in Plin. *HN* (10.23).

24 For example, he refers to Homer's testimony in 6.1: Ὅμηρος […] μαρτυρῶν δῆλός ἐστι ("it is obvious that Homer testifies"), to an oral report he has heard in 6.2: ἀκούω γοῦν τὸν λόγον ἐκεῖνον ("I hear at least the following story"), to Aristotle in 6.3: λέγει μὲν Ἀριστοτέλης ("Aristotle says"), and to a non-specified tradition in 6.5: λέγονται ("it is said that").

25 See also Gärtner 2015, 234, according to whom the action of the fable is a "Sonderfall" ("special case") of the usual behaviour of dogs on the Nile.

26 In the context of his remarks on dogs in book 8, Pliny praises their loyalty to humans in general and then lists numerous historical examples of amazingly loyal dogs (8.142–145). A few chapters earlier, Aelian (*NA* 6.48) states in the present tense that mares are good mothers and illustrates this with an example from the time of Darius III.

and, even more, Aelian often humanize animals by attributing complex mental capacities, feelings, and moral virtues to them,[27] but the animals in their anecdotes never reveal what they think or feel 'straight from the horse's mouth'. If animals 'speak' in natural history, they mimic human speech, particularly often in birds,[28] or their sudden ability to speak is reported as a *prodigium*.[29]

2.2 Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.]: The eagle, the crow and the tortoise

Contra potentes nemo est munitus satis;
si uero accessit consiliator maleficus,
uis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit.
  Aquila in sublime sustulit testudinem.
Quae cum abdidisset cornea corpus domo
nec ullo pacto laedi posset condita,
uenit per auras cornix et propter uolans:
"Opimam sane praedam rapuisti unguibus;
sed nisi monstraro quid sit faciendum tibi,
graui nequiquam te lassabit pondere."
Promissa parte suadet ut scopulum super
altis ab astris duram illidat corticem,
qua comminuta facile uescatur cibo.
Inducta uerbis, aquila monitis paruit
⟨***⟩
simul et magistrae large diuisit dapem.
  Sic tuta quae Naturae fuerat munere,
impar duabus occidit tristi nece.
(Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.])[30]

No one is sufficiently protected against the powerful; but if an evil adviser joins forces with them, whatever violence and wickedness besiege collapses. An eagle carried a tortoise high up into the air. As it had hidden its body inside its horny house and could not, safe as it was, be hurt in any way, a crow came through the air and flying alongside said <to the eagle>: "You have certainly carried off a good haul in your talons; but unless I show you what to do with it, it will tire you through its heavy weight to no purpose." When a share had been promised, <the crow> advised <the eagle> to smash the hard shell on a rock from the height of the stars,

27 For Pliny, see in particular *HN* 8.1 on the elephant. In Aelian, humanization of animals is present throughout, see Hübner 1984, 159–163.

28 See Kitchell 2020 with several examples from Pliny and Aelian.

29 Cf. for example Plin. *HN* 8.153: *canem locutum in prodigiis* […] *accepimus* ("among other prodigies we have heard that a dog spoke").

30 For Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.], see Gärtner 2021, 56–62; Baeza Angulo 2011, 44–45; Solimano 2005, 188–191; Oberg 2000, 104–106.

> so that, after crushing it, it might easily eat the meal. Persuaded by the words, the eagle obeyed the instructions <***> and at the same time generously shared the feast with its teacher. Thus, <the tortoise> that had been protected by a gift of Nature was no match for the two and died a bitter death.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

This fable, too, has obvious parallels in natural history:

> huius ingenium est et testudines raptas frangere e sublimi iaciendo, quae fors interemit poetam Aeschylum, praedictam fatis, ut ferunt, eius diei ruinam secura caeli fide cauentem.
>
> (Plin. *HN* 10.7)

> It <i.e. a kind of eagle called *morphnos*> has the clever trick to break up even tortoises that it has carried off by dropping them from a height. This accident killed the poet Aeschylus, who, as they say, was on his guard against the catastrophe of this day which had been foretold by oracles by confidently trusting in the <open> sky.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας οἱ ἀετοὶ συλλαβόντες εἶτα ἄνωθεν προσήραξαν ταῖς πέτραις, καὶ τὸ χελώνιον συντρίψαντες οὕτως ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι. ταύτῃ τοι καὶ Αἰσχύλον τὸν Ἐλευσίνιον τὸν τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιητὴν τὸν βίον ἀκούω καταστρέψαι. ὁ μὲν Αἰσχύλος ἐπί τινος πέτρας καθῆστο, τὰ εἰθισμένα δήπου φιλοσοφῶν καὶ γράφων· ἄθριξ δὲ ἦν τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ ψιλός. οἰηθεὶς οὖν ἀετὸς πέτραν εἶναι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἶτα μέντοι κατ᾽ αὐτῆς ἀφῆκεν ἣν κατεῖχε χελώνην, καὶ ἔτυχε τοῦ προειρημένου τὸ βέλος, καὶ ἀπέκτεινε τὸν ἄνδρα.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 7.16)

> Eagles seize land tortoises and then dash them on rocks from above, and having crushed the tortoise's shell they extract the flesh in this way and eat it. It was in this way, I hear, that also Aeschylus of Eleusis, the tragic poet, ended his life. Aeschylus was sitting on a rock, meditating, I suppose, and writing in his usual way. He had no hair on his head and was bald. Now an eagle, supposing that his head was a rock, then, however, dropped on it the tortoise that it was holding, and the missile struck the aforementioned man and killed him.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

In Pliny, the immediate context is the description of different kinds of eagles; in the above passage, he is discussing the third kind called *morphnos*. He provides a short general description of the eagle's behaviour in the present tense (*huius ingenium est*), using the collective singular *huius* for all eagles of this kind and the generalizing plural *testudines*, and links it with a statement on the bird's intelligence (*ingenium*)[31] and a historical example of a prominent person's death caused by the animal's behaviour (*interemit poetam Aeschylum*). In Aelian, the chapter on eagles is

31 *Ingenium*, however, might also be interpreted in the sense of 'innate quality' or 'instinct', see the translation by König/Winkler 2007, 21: "den angeborenen Instinkt" ("the innate instinct").

not directly connected to the preceding one but opens a short sequence on various birds (7.16–18). Like Pliny, he uses the present tense[32] and the plural (τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας οἱ ἀετοί) to emphasize the general nature of the bird's behaviour, but his description is more detailed: he also mentions the purpose of the eagle's strategy, that is extracting the flesh from the smashed tortoise's shell and eating it (ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι), and he reports the decisive fact that eagles deliberately drop their prey onto rocks (ταῖς πέτραις). He, too, adds the example of Aeschylus' death, but whereas Pliny only speaks of the accident (*fors*) that killed the poet, Aelian expands this into a story in the past tense in which a specific eagle (ἀετός) drops a tortoise on Aeschylus' bald head, mistaking it for a rock.

In regard to content, Phaedrus parallels natural history throughout this fable by his strong focus on realistic details of the animals' physiognomy and behaviour. The most important elements of the story, i.e. the fact that the eagle has lifted the tortoise into the air (*in sublime sustulit*, 4), breaks its shell by dropping it on a rock (*scopulum super | altis ab astris* […] *illidat corticem*, 11–12), and eats its flesh (*uescatur cibo*, 13), have parallels in Pliny and Aelian, cf. *testudines raptas frangere e sublimi iaciendo* and τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας […] συλλαβόντες […] ἄνωθεν προσήραξαν ταῖς πέτραις, καὶ τὸ χελώνιον συντρίψαντες οὕτως ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι. Phaedrus even goes beyond these two reports as he highlights the hardness and stability of the tortoise's shell on the phonetic and lexical level (cf. ***c**ornea **c**orpus*,[33] 5; *nec ullo pacto laedi*, 6; *duram* […] *corticem*, 12) and emphasizes its highly protective effect through its metaphorical description as a 'house' (*domo*, 5) in which the tortoise is safely hidden (*abdidisset*, 5; *condita*, 6). He also gives some attention to the eagle's physiognomy by mentioning its talons (*unguibus*, 8), which are the basic prerequisite for lifting the tortoise and smashing its shell from on high. Pliny and Aelian do not focus on the bird's feet in this context, but Pliny pays special attention to talons in *HN* 10.29, suggesting that birds should be classified according to their feet, which are either hooked talons or claws or webbed feet.

Stylistically, Phaedrus clearly sticks to the conventions of fable. Again, his fable starts with a promythium (1–3) that anticipates what we can learn about human life from the following narrative, setting his genre apart from natural history. Furthermore, the 'lesson' of the fable is very different from what readers can learn from the passages in Pliny and Aelian. In Pliny, the destruction of the tortoise's shell by the eagle provides evidence of the intelligence of this bird (*ingenium*), and the implicit intention of Aelian's passage seems to be the deepening of his readers' insight into the astonishing qualities that the ἄλογα, the non-human animals "without

32 The aorist προσήραξαν is gnomic and equivalent to the present tense.

33 On the effect of the *c*-alliteration, see also Gärtner 2021, 57.

reason", share with humans[34] — even if this accidently resulted in the death of a famous poet. Phaedrus, however, tells his fable to highlight that the combination of power, represented by the eagle, and wickedness, represented by the crow in the role of an adviser, is fatal for the victim (*uis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit*, 3). Therefore, his focus is not on Aeschylus' accident, which he does not mention at all, but on the fate of the tortoise that is deliberately victimized by the two birds.

In contrast to Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], the exposition (4–6) does not contain a generalizing description of the behaviour of eagles and tortoises in the present tense as would be typical of natural history, but introduces the reader directly into the concrete situation of a specific eagle some day in the past, which lifted a tortoise up into the air (*sustulit*, 4) and was — at least at that moment — not able to destroy its shell (cf. *nec* […] *laedi posset*, 6).

The exposition of Phaedrus' fable is followed by the *actio* of the crow (7–13), which suddenly turns up and flies alongside the eagle (*propter uolans*, 7). In a skilful speech, it makes the eagle promise it a share of the tortoise's flesh and in turn gives it the essential advice to smash the shell on a rock from a great height. In its *reactio* (14–15), the eagle follows the advice and gives its 'teacher' a generous share of the prey. In contrast to the tradition of natural history, Phaedrus thus introduces a third animal into the story, which acts as a teacher to the eagle in order to profit from the prey itself. The idea that different species of birds compete for the same prey, which seems to be the 'realistic' background of the interaction between the crow and the eagle,[35] or that one animal learns a new useful behaviour by imitating another, would not be fundamentally alien to natural history. Phaedrus' narrative, however, clearly enters the fantastic realms of the fable because the crow gives verbal advice to which the eagle reacts (cf. *inducta uerbis* and *monitis paruit*, 14). As in Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], the humanization of the two birds through the gift of human speech is the key difference between fable and natural history.

Only in the conclusion (16–17) might one identify a convergence with the style of natural history, as Phaedrus calls the protective shell a "gift of nature" (*Naturae* […] *munere*, 16), employing concepts and terms that are also frequent in natural history.[36]

34 Cf. in particular the *praefatio* of Ael. *NA*.

35 Crows and birds of prey such as eagles may compete for the same kind of food, which may result in crows attacking other birds, as can be seen in a great variety of media reports on the internet.

36 Cf. for example Plin. *HN* 7.167 (*munus naturae*) and 25.18 (*naturae munere*); Ael. *NA praef.* (δῶρα φύσεως); 1.21 (δῶρον ἐκ φύσεως εἰλήχασι); 1.36 (δῶρον […] ἡ φύσις […] ἔδωκεν).

2.3 Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.]: The hungry bear

Si quando in siluis urso desunt copiae,
scopulosum ad litus currit et prendens petram
pilosa crura sensim demittit uado;
quorum inter uillos simul haeserunt cammari,
in[37] terram abripiens excutit praedam maris
escaque fruitur passim collecta uafer.
Ergo etiam stultis acuit ingenium fames.
(Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= app. 22 G.])[38]

Whenever the bear lacks food supplies in the woods, it runs to the rocky shore and, clinging to a rock, gradually lowers its hairy legs into the water; as soon as crabs have got caught amidst their fur, it drags them away onto the land and shakes out the haul from the sea and, having collected the food from all sides, enjoys it, clever creature. Thus, hunger sharpens the mind even of the stupid.

(Transl. H.S.)

This description of the bear's fishing strategy seems to be unparalleled, but passages from Pliny and Aelian can be compared in some respects:

ingrediuntur et bipedes [scil. ursi]; arborem auersi derepunt. tauros ex ore cornibusque eorum omnibus pedibus suspensi pondere fatigant. nec alteri animalium in maleficio **stultitia sollertior**.

(Plin. *HN* 8.130–131)

<Bears> even walk on two feet; they crawl down a tree backward. They exhaust bulls with their weight by hanging by all four feet from their mouth and horns. And no other animal's stupidity is more skilful in its misdeeds.

(Transl. H.S.)

ursi et fruge, fronde, uindemia, pomis uiuunt et apibus, **cancris** etiam ac formicis; [...].

(Plin. *HN* 10.199)

Bears also live on crops, leaves, grapes, fruits, and bees, even on crabs and ants.

(Transl. H.S.)

δολερὸν χρῆμα ἡ ἀλώπηξ. [...] τὰ σμικρὰ δὲ ἰχθύδια θηρῶσι πάνυ σοφῶς. παρὰ τὴν ὄχθην τὴν τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἔρχονται καὶ τὴν οὐρὰν καθιᾶσιν ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ· τὰ δὲ προσνέοντα ἐνίσχεταί τε καὶ ἐμπαλάσσεται τῷ δάσει τῷ τῶν τριχῶν. αἳ δὲ αἰσθόμεναι τοῦ μὲν ὕδατος ἀναχωροῦσιν,

37 in terram codd., <se> in terram Zago.

38 On Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 169–170; Solimano 2005, 326–327; Oberg 2000, 257.

> ἐλθοῦσαι δὲ ἐς τὰ ξηρὰ χωρία διασείουσι τὰς οὐράς, καὶ ἐκπίπτει τὰ ἰχθύδια, καὶ ἐκεῖναι δεῖπνον ἀβρότατον ἔχουσιν.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.24)

> The fox is a crafty thing. […] They catch tiny fish in a very clever way. They walk along the riverbank and lower their tail into the water. And <the fish> swim up to them and are enmeshed and entangled in the shaggy hairs. When <the foxes> notice this, they withdraw from the water, go onto the dry land and shake their tails violently, and the tiny fish fall out, and the former have a most delicious meal.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> **σοφία** δὲ ἄρκτου ἦν ἄρα ἐκεῖνα.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.9)

> The following shows the cleverness of the <female> bear.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

The first passage from Pliny is found within his descriptions of the bear's physical qualities and deals with the animal's ways of moving and with its strategy for hunting down bulls; in the second passage, the bear's diet is discussed. In Aelian *NA* 6.24, the clever fishing strategy of the fox follows directly after a passage on the scorpion's ingenuity, whereas the female bear's cleverness (*NA* 6.9) in protecting its young is loosely connected to the following chapter on the docility of animals.

In content, Phaedrus' epimythium that "hunger sharpens the mind even of the stupid" (*stultis acuit ingenium fames*, 7) can be compared to Pliny's statement in 8.131 that bears are skilful in doing harm while at the same time being stupid (*nec alteri animalium in maleficio stultitia sollertior*).[39] In addition, the fact reported in the same passage that bears crawl down trees backwards (*arborem auersi derepunt*) might be compared to the movement of the bear in lines 2–3, which clings to a rock while letting its legs down backward into the water (*prendens petram* | […] *crura* […] *demittit uado*), and the crabs mentioned in Phaedrus (*cammari*, 4) are also listed as part of the bears' diet in Plin. 10.199 (*cancris*).

Aelian, too, attests the intelligence of the bear in certain behaviours (σοφία δὲ ἄρκτου, 6.9), but does not mention its general stupidity. More interesting, however, are the striking parallels between his description of the fox's clever hunting strategy and that of the bear in Phaedrus: both animals lower a part of their body into the water, the fox its tail (τὴν οὐρὰν καθιᾶσιν ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ) and the bear its legs (*crura*

39 Ovid, too, ascribes stupidity to the bear in *Hal.* 59, asking *quid nisi pondus iners* ***stolidae****que ferocia mentis?* ("what else <is it> than sluggish weight and ferocity of a stupid mind?"). The apparent clumsiness of the heavy and shaggy animal seems to be the reason why it is sometimes considered unintelligent.

[…] *demittit uado*, 3), the little fishes or crabs get entangled in the fur (τὰ δὲ [scil. σμικρὰ ἰχθύδια] προσνέοντα ἐνίσχεταί τε καὶ ἐμπαλάσσεται τῷ δάσει τῷ τῶν τριχῶν — *inter uillos simul haeserunt cammari*, 4), the fox or bear gets back on land, shakes its fur to make the prey fall out, and eats it (ἐλθοῦσαι δὲ ἐς τὰ ξηρὰ χωρία διασείουσι τὰς οὐράς, καὶ ἐκπίπτει τὰ ἰχθύδια, καὶ ἐκεῖναι δεῖπνον ἀβρότατον ἔχουσιν — *in terram abripiens excutit praedam maris | escaque fruitur passim collecta uafer*, 5–6). Thus, even though there are no exact parallels in content between Phaedrus' fable and natural history writings, the content of his fable clearly comes close to the tradition of natural history.

In style, Phaedrus' text is much closer to a natural history anecdote in the style of Pliny or Aelian than to a typical fable. It starts with *si quando* ("whenever", 1) and is written in the present tense throughout, with the only perfect *haeserunt* (4) marking the completion of an action before a new action in the present (*excutit*, 5). This is clearly a general description of a particular behaviour of bears that happens under particular circumstances (whenever the bear has no more food supplies) and can be repeated at any time, like the behaviour of the bears or foxes in Pliny and Aelian. The singular (*urso*, 1) does not refer to a specific individual but must be interpreted as a collective singular, as is the case in the two passages from Aelian (ἡ ἀλώπηξ, 6.24; ἄρκτου, 6.9). Further, the focus is on a realistic step-by-step description of the bear's behaviour with many illustrative details, e.g. the rocky shore (*scopulosum ad litus*, 2), the hairy legs that are lowered gradually into the water (*pilosa crura sensim demittit*, 3), and the fact that the bear collects the crabs from all directions (*passim collecta*, 6) after shaking them out of its fur. This very detailed representation is quite similar to that in Ael. *NA* 6.24. The bear is not humanized through verbal speech or thoughts, it shares only the mental quality of cleverness (*uafer*, 6) with humans. The idea that non-human animals have many mental (and also moral) virtues that are claimed to be restricted to humans is present throughout Aelian's work and can also be found in the above passages (δολερὸν χρῆμα ἡ ἀλώπηξ, 6.24; σοφία δὲ ἄρκτου […] ἐκεῖνα, 6.9). Finally, the 'typical' structure of the narrative part of fables, which often comprises an exposition, an exchange of *actio* and *reactio*, and a result, is hardly noticeable here,[40] as the bear's actions appear as a continuous process, very similar to the generalizing descriptions of animal behaviour in natural history. Interestingly, the epimythium, which is a standard element of fables, does not explicitly refer to humans, as does the promythium in 1.25 Z. [= G.] (*cautis hominibus*, 1), but *stultis* (7) seems to include humans *and* non-human animals. There is no longer a clear analogy between the animal world and human

40 One might distinguish an exposition in 1, the *actio* of the bear in 2–3, the *reactio* of the crabs in 4, and the result in 5–6, but this does not seem very convincing to me.

world, as would be typical of fable, and the last sentence could also be read as the concluding remark of a natural history anecdote.

2.4 Phaed. *app.* 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.]: The snake and the lizard

Serpens lacertam forte auersam prenderat,
quam deuorare patula cum uellet gula,
arripuit illa prope iacentem surculum
et pertinaci morsu transuersum tenens
auidum sollerti rictum frenauit mora.
Praedam dimisit ore serpens irritam.
(Phaed. *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.])[41]

A snake had by chance caught a lizard from behind. When it wanted to devour it with its gaping throat, <the lizard> seized a twig lying nearby and holding it transversely with firm bite restrained the greedy jaws with the ingenious obstacle. The snake released from its mouth the prey that had been caught in vain.

(Transl. H.S.)

Snakes feed on other reptiles like lizards and Pliny mentions battles between lizards and snakes (*HN* 8.97), but there seem to be no exact parallels to this description of a lizard's behaviour either in natural history or in other sources. However, Pliny and Aelian provide accounts that are in some way comparable:

sed aduersum ire soli hi [scil. Tentyritae] audent [scil. crocodilis], quin et flumini innatant dorsoque equitantium modo inpositi hiantibus resupino capite ad morsum addita in os claua, a dextra ac laeua tenentes extrema eius utrimque, ut frenis in terram agunt captiuos […].

(Plin. *HN* 8.93)

But these men alone <i.e. the Tentyritae> dare to go against them <i.e. the crocodiles>; they even swim in the river and, sitting on their back like riders, when they open their jaws with the head thrown backward to bite, insert a wooden club into their mouth, and holding its ends on both sides on the right and on the left, drive them to the land as their prisoners as if with bridles […].

(Transl. H.S.)

Σοφόν τι ἄρα χρῆμα ἦν γένος βατράχων Αἰγυπτίων, καὶ οὖν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὑπερφέρουσι κατὰ πολύ. ἐὰν γὰρ ὕδρῳ περιπέσῃ Νείλου θρέμματι βάτραχος, καλάμου τρύφος ἐνδακὼν πλάγιον φέρει καὶ ἀπρὶξ ἔχεται καὶ οὐκ ἀνίησι κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν. ὃ δὲ ἀμηχανεῖ καταπιεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ

41 On Phaed. *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 172; Solimano 2005, 328–331; Oberg 2000, 259–260.

καλάμῳ· οὐ γάρ οἱ χωρεῖ περιβαλεῖν τοσοῦτον τὸ στόμα, ὅσον ὁ κάλαμος διείργει. καὶ ἐκ τούτου περιγίνονται τῆς ῥώμης τῶν ὕδρων οἱ βάτραχοι τῇ σοφίᾳ.

(Ael. *VH* 1.3)

A clever thing is a species of Egyptian frogs, and therefore they are much superior to the others. For if a frog encounters a water snake, a creature of the Nile, it bites off a piece of reed, carries it transversely, holds it tightly and does not let it go with all its strength. <The water snake>, however, cannot swallow it together with the reed, because it does not manage to encompass it with its mouth as much as the reed is wide. And, as a result, the frogs overcome the strength of the water snakes through their cleverness.

(Transl. H.S.)

In the context of the above passage, Pliny describes the Nile crocodile and its natural enemies, including the inhabitants of the island of Tentyris, who are the only humans to face the horrible animals bravely. They defeat them by sitting on their backs and inserting a club transversely into their gaping mouths which they use like reins. Aelian here and in the following chapter also deals with Egyptian animals, but in contrast to the human-animal interaction in Pliny he describes the interaction between two animals, one of which outwits the stronger one through its cleverness (cf. σοφόν τι […] χρῆμα and τῇ σοφίᾳ): by holding a piece of reed transversely in its mouth, the Nile frog becomes too wide to fit into the mouth of the water snake. While in Pliny the humans bridle the crocodiles' mouths with a club held transversely, Aelian's frog holds the reed in its own mouth.

In terms of content, the fable is much closer to Aelian than to Pliny:[42] the lizard and the Nile frog both keep a kind of stick transversely in their mouth to avoid being swallowed by a snake (*surculum* […] | […] *transuersum tenens*, 3–4; cf. καλάμου τρύφος […] πλάγιον φέρει) with the slight difference that the lizard is stuck in the snake's throat with the lower half of its body (cf. *auersam prenderat*, 1) whereas the frog has not yet been caught by the water snake. The behaviour of the lizard and the snake is rendered with many realistic details that are also present in Aelian and Pliny, in particular the gaping mouth of the snake (*patula* […] *gula*, 2; *auidum* […] *rictum*, 5; cf. *hiantibus* referring to the crocodiles) and the lizard's tight grip on the twig lying transversely in its mouth (*pertinaci morsu transuersum tenens*, 4; cf. πλάγιον φέρει καὶ ἀπρὶξ ἔχεται καὶ οὐκ ἀνίησι κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν). Like in Aelian, the lizard's natural behaviour shows its cleverness (*sollerti* […] *mora*, 5; cf. σοφόν τι […] χρῆμα and τῇ σοφίᾳ).

42 The question who used whom as a source would be very difficult to answer and cannot be discussed here. Phaedrus may have been inspired by Pliny (cf. in particular *frenauit*, 5; cf. *ut frenis*), and may have modified the story himself, which was taken up by Aelian later. But it is also plausible that Phaedrus and Aelian used a single source that is no longer extant.

Stylistically, this fable parallels natural history in a similar way to the previous one, as it entirely lacks any humanization of animals through speech or thought. But whereas Pliny and Aelian provide generalizing descriptions of human and animal behaviour in the present tense, Phaedrus is not describing in general the trick lizards use to escape from a snake's mouth, but telling the story of a specific lizard and a specific snake, which happened "by chance" (*forte*, 1) some time in the past.

Phaedrus' fable is preceded by a later prose introduction with the message that "when strength is lacking, guile must be used",[43] but we cannot be sure if the original fable contained a promythium at all.[44] Hence, we should be cautious about claiming that this fable parallels natural history stylistically through a deliberate lack of a promythium. However, it can at least be noted that, as in Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.], the typical fable structure recedes into the background behind a more continuous narrative.[45]

2.5 Phaed. *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.]: The beaver

Canes effugere cum iam non possit fiber
(Graeci loquaces quem dixerunt castorem
et indiderunt bestiae nomen dei,
illi qui iactant se uerborum copia),
abripere morsu fertur testiculos sibi,
quia propter illos sentiat ⟨se⟩se peti.
Diuina quod ratione fieri non negem;
uenator namque simul inuenit remedium,
omittit ipsum persequi et ⟨re⟩uocat canes.
Hoc si praestare possent homines, ut suo
uellent carere, tuti posthac uiuerent;
haud quisquam insidias nudo faceret corpori.
(Phaed. *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.])[46]

When the beaver is no longer able to escape from dogs (the loquacious Greeks have called it 'castor' and have given the animal the name of a god, they who brag about the abundance of

43 *Ubi leonis pellis deficit uulpinam insuendam esse: hoc est ubi deficiunt uires astu utendum* ("If a lion's skin is not available, a fox's skin must be sewn on; that is, if strength is missing, guile must be used.").

44 Cf. Zago 2020, 181.

45 It would be less convincing to distinguish an exposition (1–2), the actio of the lizard (3–4), the reactio of the snake (5), and a conclusion (6).

46 On Phaed. *app.* 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 176–177; Solimano 2005, 334–337; Oberg 2000, 266–268; and Silvia Mattiacci's contribution in this volume.

their words) it is said to bite off its testicles because it understands that it is hunted for them. That this happens according to a divine plan I cannot deny; for as soon as the hunter has found the medicine, he ceases to pursue the beaver itself and calls back the dogs. If men could manage to be willing to do without their property, they would live safely in the future; no one would set a trap for a naked body.

(Transl. H.S.)

The beaver's behaviour described here was quite frequently treated in ancient literature.[47] With regards to natural history, the following passages can be quoted as parallels:

Easdem partes sibi ipsi Pontici amputant fibri periculo urgente, ob hoc se peti gnari; castoreum id uocant medici.

(Plin. *HN* 8.109)

The beavers living at the Black Sea cut off the same parts of their bodies when threatened by danger, as they know that they are hunted for this reason; the doctors call it 'castoreum' <'beaver-oil'>.

(Transl. H.S.)

[…] spectabili naturae potentia, in iis quoque, quibus et in terris uictus est, sicut fibris, quos castoras uocant et castorea testes eorum. amputari hos ab ipsis, cum capiantur, negat Sextius diligentissimus medicinae, quin immo paruos esse substrictosque et adhaerentes spinae, nec adimi sine uita animalis posse; […].

(Plin. *HN* 32.26)

[…] Equally remarkable is the might of Nature also in those animals that live <in the water and> also on land, such as the beavers, which they call "castors" and their testicles "castorea". Sextius, who is most scrupulous in the field of medicine, denies that these are bitten off by <the beavers> themselves when they are being caught; on the contrary they are small, as he says, drawn inwards, and attached to the spine, and cannot be taken away without the animal's life; […].

(Transl. H.S.)

οὐκοῦν ἐπίσταται τὴν αἰτίαν δι᾽ ἣν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν οἱ θηραταὶ σὺν προθυμίᾳ τε καὶ ὁρμῇ τῇ πάσῃ χωροῦσι, καὶ ἐπικύψας καὶ δακὼν ἀπέκοψε τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ ὄρχεις, καὶ προσέρριψεν αὐτοῖς, ὡς ἀνὴρ φρόνιμος λησταῖς μὲν περιπεσών, καταθεὶς δὲ ὅσα ἐπήγετο ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας, λύτρα δήπου ταῦτα ἀλλαττόμενος. ἐὰν δὲ ᾖ πρότερον ἐκτεμὼν καὶ σωθεὶς εἶτα πάλιν διώκηται, ὃ δὲ ἀναστήσας ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιδείξας ὅτι τῆς αὐτῶν σπουδῆς οὐκ ἔχει τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, τοῦ περαιτέρου καμάτου παρέλυσε τοὺς θηρατάς· ἧττον γάρ ἔτι τῶν κρεῶν ἐκείνοις φροντίς ἐστι. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ἔνορχοι ὄντες, ὡς ὅτι πορρωτάτω ἑαυτοὺς ἀποσπάσαντες τῷ δρόμῳ, εἶτα

47 Cf. Cic. *Scaur*. 2.14 Olechowska; *Nux* 165–166 (allusion); Juv. 12.34–36; Apul. *Met.* 1.9; in the ancient fable it only occurs after Phaedrus (Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.]).

ὑποστείλαντες τὸ σπουδαζόμενον μέρος, πάνυ σοφῶς καὶ πανούργως ἐξηπάτησαν, ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντες ἃ κρύψαντες ἔσχον.

(Ael. *NA* 6.34)

Thus, <the beaver> understands the reason why hunters come after it with all their eagerness and effort, and it bows down and bites off its testicles and throws them before them, like a prudent man who, after he has fallen into the hands of robbers, puts down all he is carrying to save his own life, doubtless giving it in exchange as ransom. If, however, it has castrated itself earlier and after saving its life is then again pursued, it stands up and demonstrates that it offers no ground for their eagerness and releases the hunters from further effort; for they care less about its meat. Often, however, also beavers with <intact> testicles, after escaping as far away as possible by running, have then drawn in the coveted part and tricked <the hunters> in a very clever and crafty way, as if they no longer possessed what they indeed possessed, concealing it.

(Transl. H.S.)

In Pliny, the self-castration of the beaver in danger (8.109) is immediately preceded by a chapter on the castration of new-born male wild asses by their fathers. In the context of 32.26, Pliny is speaking of remedies produced from animals that live in water; here, he discusses the so-called 'beaver-oil' (*castoreum*), a viscous fluid for territorial scent-marking produced in organs that were thought to be the male animal's testicles in Antiquity but are in fact the so-called castor sacs, "a pair of pouch-like structures located between the kidneys and bladder" possessed by both male and female beavers.[48] Based on the pharmacological writer Sextius, Pliny denies that the beaver cuts off its 'testicles' itself because this would cause its death. In Aelian, the chapter on the self-castration of the beaver is loosely linked to the three preceding chapters on animals hunted by humans. In contrast to Pliny, he discusses not only the act itself but also the tricks with which already castrated or still intact beavers escape hunters, either displaying their belly deprived of the coveted 'testicles', or pretending to have lost them already by drawing them inwards.

It is obvious that Phaedrus' knowledge about the beaver is shared with ancient natural history. The idea that beavers cut off their testicles when they are hunted (*canes effugere cum iam non possit*, 1; *uenator*, 8) is expressed in a more general way in Pliny (*periculo urgente* and *peti*, 8.109; *cum capiantur*, 32.26), who does not explicitly mention humans as hunters, in contrast to Aelian (οἱ θηραταί). Phaedrus then, in a kind of parenthesis (2–4), adds a mini-excursus on the animal's Greek name *castor*, which has a parallel in Pliny 32.26 (*quos castoras uocant*). According to 5–6, the beaver bites off its testicles (*abripere morsu* […] *testiculos sibi*) because it is aware that it is pursued for them (*quia propter illos sentiat <se>se peti*). The beaver's

48 Cf. Rosell/Campbell-Palmer 2022, 85–86, here: 85.

teeth as the instrument of castration are explicitly mentioned by Aelian (δακὼν ἀπέκοψε) whereas this detail is obscured somewhat by Pliny, who uses the more technical term *amputare*; if Phaedrus used Pliny as a source, he obviously ignored Pliny's critical remarks on the beaver's self-castration in *HN* 32.26 (*negat Sextius diligentissimus medicinae*). Like Phaedrus, both writers highlight the animal's awareness that the hunters are interested in its testicles (Plin. *HN* 32.26: *ob hoc se peti gnari*; Ael. *NA* 6.34: ἐπίσταται τὴν αἰτίαν δι᾽ ἣν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν οἱ θηραταὶ [...] χωροῦσι); the use of the testicles as a remedy (*remedium*, 8) is discussed in detail by Pliny at 32.27–31. Finally, the result that the hunter stops pursuing the beaver after finding the testicles (8–9) has a parallel in Aelian, according to whom the animal throws its amputated testicles in the hunters' path (καὶ προσέρριψεν αὐτοῖς).

Phaedrus' convergence with natural history is also evident in style. He describes the repetitive behaviour of beavers, using the present tense throughout the fable and in one case the perfect (*inuēnit*, 8) to mark the completion of an action before another one starts (*omittit*, 9).[49] The collective singulars *fiber* (1) and *uenator* (8) stand for beavers' persecution by hunters in general and not for specific individuals that interacted with each other on a particular day in the past. The description is naturalistic throughout and does not contain any signs of humanization such as human speech or thoughts. Remarks on the non-Roman names (cf. *Graeci* [...] *dixerunt castorem*, 2) of humans, animals, and things are frequent in natural history, as can be seen in the passages from Pliny (*castoreum id uocant medici*, 8.109; *quos castoras uocant et castorea testes eorum*, 32.26),[50] and thus Phaedrus is matching the 'didactic' style of natural history. However, he goes beyond mere *didaxis* by attacking the Greeks for their loquaciousness (*loquaces*, 2; *qui iactant se uerborum copia*, 4): here, the poet Phaedrus and his poetical programme of *breuitas* come to the fore.[51] The impersonal formula *fertur* (5) is rare in Phaedrus and only here does it seem to refer to a non-specified tradition of knowledge.[52] As in the case of *traditum est* (1.25.4), the formula evidently serves to underline the credibility of what is told, and in this way, too, Phaedrus comes close to the style of natural history.[53]

49 Pliny uses the present tense throughout, Aelian mixes the gnomic aorist and present tense.

50 There are many more examples in books 8 and 32, e.g. *nabun Aethiopes uocant*, 8.69 ("the Ethiopians call it nabu") and *quas Graeci* φρύνους *uocant*, 32.50 ("which the Greeks call phrynoi <i.e. toads>").

51 Cf. also Baeza Angulo 2011, 176 n. 65.

52 The other instances of *fertur* do not refer to traditions of knowledge (1.10.8 Z. [= G.], 1.27.9 Z. [= G.], 3.3.2 Z. [= G.]).

53 There are several instances of *fertur* referring to a certain tradition in Pliny, e.g. 12.108; 19.128; 21.12; 31.55; 32.3; 35.66; 36.17; 36.127.

Whereas the use of the first person (*non negem*, 7) is frequent in the pro- and epilogues and in the pro- and epimythia of Phaedrus' fables,[54] the 'author'[55] Phaedrus does not speak up elsewhere in the narrative parts of his fables. Thus, *non negem* (7) is indeed unusual and might be interpreted as a coming close to natural history, where authors often speak in the first person to present their personal opinion, observations, or knowledge: there are many examples in Pliny and Aelian.[56] Also, the idea that the gods or divine Nature have organized the world in a most reasonable way and care for its creatures (*diuina quod ratione fieri non negem*, 7) can be interpreted as a parallel to natural history thinking and is found in Pliny's and Aelian's works too.[57]

Like the previous two texts, this fable does not seem to correspond to the 'typical' structure of fable with actio and reactio; instead, it contains a continuous narrative with an inserted mini-excursus (2–4) and a commentary by the 'author' (7), coming quite close to a natural history anecdote. Only the epimythium (10–12) is clearly recognizable and explicitly transfers the beaver's behaviour to human life: by using a counterfactual conditional clause (*hoc si praestare possent homines* […] | *tuti posthac uiuerent*, 10–11), Phaedrus makes clear that humans are — usually — unable to act like the beaver but would benefit from doing so, and so the animal serves as an exemplary model for them. It should be mentioned that Aelian, too, in

54 Cf. Oberg 2000, 14.

55 That is, the author-persona, not the empirical author.

56 For example, there are 55 instances of *arbitror* ("I believe") in Pliny's *Natural history* outside the *praefatio*, in five cases in combination with *equidem* ("as far as I am concerned"). Aelian, too, often speaks in the first person singular outside his prologue, cf. the following examples from book 1: 1.6: ἀκούω ("I hear"); 1.49: καὶ ἔπεισί μοι θαυμάζειν ("and I am astonished"); 1.51: ὡς κρίνειν ἐμέ ("as I estimate"); 1.53: καὶ τὴν μὲν αἰτίαν εἰπεῖν οὐκ οἶδα, ὃ δὲ οἶδα τοῦτο εἶπον ("and the reason for this I am unable to tell, but I have told what I know").

57 Pliny emphasizes throughout his work that divine Nature has created everything for the sake of mankind, cf. for example *HN* 27.2 where he underlines that our knowledge about plants and the remedies derived from them is not a human invention but comes from the gods or Nature (*nunc uero **deorum** fuisse eam apparet aut certe **diuinam**,* […] *eandemque omnium parentem et genuisse haec et ostendisse*, "But now it is clear that <the rich knowledge about plants> has been the gift of the gods or at least inspired by them, […] and that the same mother of all things both produced and showed this <to us>"). Even in the most marvellous natural phenomena there is a "plan" (*et in his quidem, tametsi mirabilis, est tamen aliqua **ratio***, "and in these things there is indeed, however marvellous, nevertheless a kind of plan", *HN* 9.178). In contrast to Pliny, Aelian underlines the idea that the gods do not disdain the non-human animals, but take care of them and love them, cf. *NA* 11.31: πρόνοιαν αὐτῶν [scil. τῶν ζῴων] **οἱ θεοὶ** ποιοῦνται, καὶ οὔτε αὐτῶν καταφρονοῦσιν οὔτε μὴν ὀλιγώρως ἔχουσιν […]. ὅπως οὖν καὶ αὐτὰ φιλεῖται **θεοῖς** ἐρῶ […] ("The gods care for them and neither look down upon them nor indeed disdain them […]. I will now explain how they, too, are loved by the gods […]").

the above passage links the beaver's behaviour to that of a prudent man who, falling into the hands of robbers, saves his life by giving away all he is carrying as a ransom (ὡς ἀνὴρ φρόνιμος λῃσταῖς μὲν περιπεσών, καταθεὶς δὲ ὅσα ἐπήγετο ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας, λύτρα δήπου ταῦτα ἀλλαττόμενος). But the fundamental difference between Aelian and Phaedrus' epimythium is that Aelian compares the animal's behaviour to that of an intelligent human in order to highlight that non-human animals, too, have astonishing mental skills, whereas Phaedrus turns the story about the beaver into a kind of lesson for humans. Further, it must be noted that Aelian often contrasts a description of positive animal behaviour with negative human behaviour at the end of his anecdotes. This structure can in some ways be compared to the epimythium of a fable,[58] but the crucial difference is that Aelian's focus is on the contrast between 'good animals' and 'evil humans', whereas Phaedrus' epimythium suggests that humans should imitate the animal's behaviour.

3 Conclusion

The study of the five fables from Phaedrus' collection demonstrates that the poet is not only interested in 'real' animals, but also in unusual and spectacular animal behaviours with more or less obvious parallels in Pliny and Aelian, two prominent representatives of natural history in the Imperial period. Regardless of source-critical questions, of whether Phaedrus invented the astonishing strategies of the lizard and the bear himself or whether all three authors rely on some common animal lore, it can be concluded that Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in content by the fact that he shares detailed 'knowledge' of animals with Pliny and Aelian.

The style of natural history is matched to varying degrees. Generally, if we imagine the genre of fable as one pole and that of natural history as the other, we might say that the first two texts (Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.] and 2.6 Z. [= G.]) are obviously closer to fable, because despite their naturalistic details they have a promythium that clearly anticipates a kind of 'lesson', they report the behaviour of specific animals in the past, and humanize these animals in a fantastical way through the gift of speech. The last three fables stand out for their lack of animal speech, so they come closer to natural history anecdotes. Two of them, Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.] on

58 Cf. Hübner 1984, 162; cf. for example Ael. *NA* 7.17 (certain birds take care of elderly fellow birds whereas humans despise old age) and 17.40 (elephants worship the gods whereas humans have doubts about their existence).

the bear and *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.] on the beaver, also provide generalizing descriptions of animals' behaviour in the present tense that could be repeated at any time, and Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.] even has an epimythium that does not draw explicit parallels between the bear and the human world. Here, the metrical form of the verse fable seems to be the only clear criterion that distinguishes it from a natural history anecdote.

This convergence between fables and natural history has several effects. First, the poet seems to imply that he does not exclusively regard the animals in his fables as fantastic representatives of human characters, but is also bearing their original 'animal' nature in mind. Interestingly, all five fables deal with animals' mental capacities, in particular with their cleverness in saving their own lives (the dog, the lizard, and the beaver) or in hunting down prey (the eagle and the bear). This in turn seems to encourage the application to Phaedrus' fables of Human-Animal Studies, which emphasize the interest in 'real' animals and in their intrinsic value.[59] Second, the display of more unusual and spectacular 'knowledge' of animals shows Phaedrus as a *poeta doctus* who not only alludes to prominent predecessors in the field of poetry but is also familiar with the natural history lore of his time. Third, fables like that of the hungry bear (*app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.]) that deliberately confound readers' expectations of the genre by breaking some of its most important conventions show Phaedrus' particular mastery of the genre and suggest that he was addressing a learned audience, capable of appreciating his play upon genre conventions.

In the history of the Graeco-Latin fable, Phaedrus was, of course, not the only one to 'experiment' with the blurring of boundaries between fable and natural history: Fables of this kind can be found in the Greek prose fable collections in particular, but occasionally also in the verse fable collections by Babrius and Avianus.[60] With regard to the five fables by Phaedrus studied in this paper, it is remarkable, however, that only the fable on the eagle, the crow and the tortoise (Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.]) is paralleled by several versions in later fable collections, which partly differ

59 For an introduction into this growing interdisciplinary field, see for example Kompatscher/Gufler et al. 2021 and De Mello 2012.

60 Cf. for example Aesop. 25 P. [= Hsr.; 28 Ch.] on the kingfisher, 65 P. [= 66 Hsr.; 255 Ch.] on the bear, 195 P. [= 210 Hsr.; 149 Ch.] on the camel, 203 P. [= 219 Hsr.; 305 Ch.] on the monkey, 214 P. [= 234 Hsr.; 327 Ch.] on the mole, 218 P. [= 243 Hsr.; 308 Ch.] on the mother ape (parallel versions: Babr. 35 and Avian. 35), Aesop. 242 P. [= 241 Hsr.; 341 Ch.] and 243 P. [= 240 Hsr.; 340 Ch.] on the hyena, Avian. 27 (parallel version: Rom. 4.13 [= 87 Thiele]) on the crow and the pitcher. For the influence of natural history on the ancient fable, see Adrados 1999, 40–41 and 234–235.

considerably from Phaedrus' version.[61] By contrast, Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.] on the dog and the crocodile is only paralleled by a late Latin prose paraphrase (Ademar 37), *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.] on the beaver is only paralleled by Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.], and there seem to be no parallel versions at all of *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.] on the hungry bear and of *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.] on the snake and the lizard. In respect of the reception history of Phaedrus, it might therefore be concluded that his fables which show marked interest in natural history and 'realistic' animal behaviour were not his most successful ones.

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61 Cf. Babr. 115, Avian. 2, Aesop. 230 P. [= 259 Hsr.; 352 Ch.] and Rom. 1.4 [= 17 Thiele]. For a comparison, see Gärtner 2021, 59–62.

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Claudia Luchetti

The Ideal Philosopher as "Fabulator": Socratic-Platonic Variations on Aesop in the *Phaedo*

Abstract: My contribution intends to corroborate the thesis that the reference to Aesop in the Platonic *Phaedo* (60a–61b) is not random. This non-randomness can be demonstrated on at least three levels: first, in terms of the profound intellectual and methodological similarities that exist between Socrates and Aesop. Secondly, it can be shown that citing Aesop plays a fundamental role not only in the opening scene of the *Phaedo*, but within the argumentative and dramaturgical structure of the whole dialogue. Thirdly, and in line with Plato's urge to elevate the figure of his master Socrates into a paradigm of philosophical theory and practice, the staging of an improvisation on an Aesopic pattern allows Plato to create a new, common literary genre that can synthesize both λόγος and μῦθος.

> ἃ μὲν οὖν τυγχάνω ἀκηκοὼς φθόνος οὐδεὶς λέγειν.
> καὶ γὰρ ἴσως καὶ μάλιστα πρέπει μέλλοντα ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ
> μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ, ποίαν τινὰ αὐτὴν οἰόμεθα εἶναι·
> τί γὰρ ἄν τις καὶ ποιοῖ ἄλλο ἐν τῷ μέχρι ἡλίου δυσμῶν χρόνῳ;
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 61d9–62e4)[1]

1 Introduction

In the famous opening of Plato's *Phaedo* (60a9–61b7) Socrates, imprisoned in Athens awaiting the execution of his death sentence, has been freed from his chains to allow him to entertain himself with his friends for the last time. The first words addressed to them turn out to be a fable on the hybrid nature of psychic and

I sincerely thank the editors for their suggestions, which have been a source of inspiration as well as motivation for me to pursue a line of research, to paraphrase Plato, just as beautiful as it is difficult.

1 "The things that I have heard, nothing can restrain me from telling them to you. And indeed, to one who is about to embark on his journey through the world beyond, nothing seems to me to suit better than pondering and fabulating about his journey and dwelling in the world beyond, of what nature we may think it is. And after all, what else could be done in the meantime until the sun sets?" (Transl. C.L.).

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physical pleasure, which arises from its opposite, pain, and again fades into it, in a continuous alternation that does not allow the two to exist simultaneously in man. Taking inspiration from the surprising nature, the atopy (ἄτοπον, 60b3), represented by the mixture of pleasure and pain, Socrates, remarkably, mentions a literary heritage of which nothing is heard in the whole rest of the Platonic corpus: he explicitly mentions Aesop, starting in 60c1, imagining the fable (μῦθος, c2) that the poet would have written to tell the wonder of the relationship between these two beings: wishing to reconcile them, in order to prevent them from fighting each other relentlessly, the God decided *to unite them by the head*, producing a two-headed prodigy.

Asked by his friends why he had made the sudden decision to write poetry, "putting Aesop's fables into verse and music" (60d1), Socrates replies that he wanted to follow in this way the instructions of the God (Apollo), who, through a recurring dream (60e4–61b1), incited him to compose music. To avoid any doubt that philosophy, the "highest music" and poietic activity (μεγίστη μουσική, 61a3–4), did not completely exhaust the desire of the God, and even though Socrates considered himself an author of reasoning (λόγος) rather than a fable-teller (μυθολογικός), and since he remembered the fables of Aesop by heart, he therefore decided to create poetry out of them.

The purpose of my contribution is twofold: on the one hand, moving from a hypothesis already supported by few scholars, I endorse the thesis that the reference to Aesop in the *Phaedo* is not random, and I hope to do so with arguments that are not lacking in originality. In pursuing this goal, I will move on from the conviction that Plato chose Aesop due to the existence of some *essential* similarities with Socrates, and plausibly with Plato himself, considered as the philosophical writer behind the curtain.

On the other hand, I will attempt to show, at a first level, how the Socratic improvisation on the Aesopic material constitutes an indispensable component of the dramaturgical and speculative development of the *Phaedo*. At a second level, I will try to shed light on Plato's intentions, which are not, in my opinion, to produce a genre antagonistic to fable, with his philosophical λόγος — of which he would thus wrongly be claiming the absolute paternity. Plato's aim is rather to create, within the genre of philosophical discourse, a *new kind* of philosophical λόγος tailored to his master Socrates; this genre would be as maieutic as Socrates himself, assimilating patterns of the literary genre of fable and thus able to *synthesize* both logical and mythical instances.

Lastly, while always drawing from a Platonic perspective, I shall end by outlining some preliminary conclusions on the overarching topic of genres, addressing the question of the interplay between philosophical writing and fable.

2 Socrates and Aesop in the mirror

If we start looking at the resemblances between Aesop and Socrates, the first to leap out are those that emerge from a comparison of their biographies, including those elements of likeness related to common intellectual features. The large number of parallels between Aesop and Socrates, both in outward appearance and in their fates in life and death, have already been the subject of much detailed research drawing on the *Life of Aesop* and, for Socrates, mainly on the first Platonic tetralogy (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) and the *Symposium*.[2]

However, to be able to discern the possible existence of a more substantial kinship between Aesop and Socrates, we must look at the only source available to us, the passage in the *Phaedo* which reports Socrates' improvisation:

> ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης ἀνακαθιζόμενος εἰς τὴν κλίνην συνέκαμψέ τε τὸ σκέλος καὶ ἐξέτριψε τῇ χειρί, καὶ τρίβων ἅμα, "Ὡς ἄτοπον", ἔφη, "ὦ ἄνδρες, ἔοικέ τι εἶναι τοῦτο ὃ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ· ὡς θαυμασίως πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν ἐναντίον εἶναι, τὸ λυπηρόν, τὸ ἅμα μὲν αὐτὼ μὴ ἐθέλειν παραγίγνεσθαι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἐὰν δέ τις διώκῃ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ λαμβάνῃ, σχεδόν τι ἀναγκάζεσθαι ἀεὶ λαμβάνειν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, ὥσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς κορυφῆς ἡμμένω δύ' ὄντε. καί μοι δοκεῖ, ἔφη, εἰ ἐνενόησεν αὐτὰ Αἴσωπος, μῦθον ἂν συνθεῖναι ὡς ὁ θεὸς βουλόμενος αὐτὰ διαλλάξαι πολεμοῦντα, ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἐδύνατο, συνῆψεν εἰς ταὐτὸν αὐτοῖς τὰς κορυφάς, καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ᾧ ἂν τὸ ἕτερον παραγένηται ἐπακολουθεῖ ὕστερον καὶ τὸ ἕτερον. ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ μοι ἔοικεν· ἐπειδὴ ὑπὸ τοῦ δεσμοῦ ἦν ἐν τῷ σκέλει τὸ ἀλγεινόν, ἥκειν δὴ φαίνεται ἐπακολουθοῦν τὸ ἡδύ."
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 60b1–c7)

> Socrates, who had already risen to sit up on the bed, bent his leg over and rubbed it hard with his hand; and so, while he was rubbing it, "What an extraordinary thing," he said, "O friends, this seems to be what men call pleasure, and what a marvellous nature it is in relation to what might be thought to be its opposite, pain! For they do not wish to be both simultaneously in the human being, but then, if one pursues either and captures it, he in a certain way always finds himself compelled to seize the other as well, as if they were joined by one head, although being two. And it seems to me," he said, "that if Aesop had been thinking of them, he would have composed a fable about them: that is, how the God, wishing to reconcile these two beings at war against each other and not succeeding, tied their heads to the same point; and so, to anyone who gets close to one of them, the other one follows after him. As it seems to have

2 McPherran 2012; Kurke 2006; 2011; Zafiropoulos 2011; 2015. For the evidence that Aesop's vicissitudes were well known at the time Plato was composing his writings, see McPherran 2012, 2. A word on methodology: although it is intriguing to compare Socrates and Aesop on the basis of the Aesop novel, it must be borne in mind that there are around 600–700 years between the Platonic writings and the *Vita Aesopi*.

> happened to me: for whereas before, under the weight of the chain, there was pain in my leg, pleasure, following closely, appears to come immediately after it."
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

In this passage, Plato lets the imprisoned Socrates indirectly recount an Aesopic fable by having him wonder what story Aesop would have imagined to illustrate the unique mixture of pleasure and pain that he experiences. The image of the two emotions bound together by the head, while not constituting a full narrative in itself as represented by other comparable fables (see below), is clearly connected to the Aesopic tradition by the mention of Aesop directly following it. As such, it is noteworthy that in this passage, Socrates is presented as directly interpreting the 'fabulistic' image, applying and comparing it to his present situation; thus, one might see Socrates as demonstrating the imagined process of reception of fable literature — he appears as a prototypical reader, interpreter, and creator of fables.

The mere fact that Plato, in a dialogue that more than any other can be viewed as a monument to the memory of Socrates, chooses to portray his master in the act of versifying, drawing inspiration from Aesopic fables, not only gives a clear indication that this choice is not fortuitous, but is also a sign that Aesop is recognized as an intellectual of the highest calibre: feeling himself obliged to the God who appeared in his dream not only to compose music philosophically, but also to set music in verse, Socrates, in choosing Aesop, chooses that material which in his memory is most *congenial* to him, as bearing a core of wisdom, which in turn is the fruit of an inclination to *philosophical* reflection of its author, considered by Socrates *equal* to his own.

If, reading between the lines as it were, I am correctly interpreting Plato's intention of not only comparing, but also setting at the same level two heavyweights of Greek culture — where 'culture' is used here in deliberately general terms to avoid placing too rigid boundaries on Aesopic and Socratic literary genres[3] — by assimilating them in their common philosophical attitude, we should expect, from the *ad hoc* μῦθος created in *Phaedo* 60b1–c7, the emergence of a deep structural affinity in the narrative content, which would justify Plato's *coup de théâtre* of attributing to the fable in question this double Aesopic-Socratic paternity.

3 Such a demarcation presupposes upstream a sharp contrast between λόγος and μῦθος, and between being a λογικός rather than a μυθολογικός; in my opinion, in a Socratic-Platonic view, this demarcation has no foundation, as I shall show in the second section of this contribution.

3 Glimpses of convergences in the Aesopic and Socratic mindsets

Though a careful analysis of the broad Aesopic material in search of the possible candidates for Socratic improvisational storytelling is always open to the risk of over-interpretation of even the most promising results,[4] there is a conspicuous number of fables that have both conceptual and narrative affinities with the phenomenon reworked in mythical guise on an Aesopic template in the *Phaedo*.[5] In the following I will compare instances of Platonic-Socratic thought with examples from the *Collectio Augustana* and the fables of Babrius; while both of these collections are works of the Imperial period (2nd–3rd century CE) and are not of a pre-Platonic origin *stricto sensu*, they will serve as a basis to suppose a link — or, at least, a common frame of reference — between ideas expressed in Plato's writings and the ancient fable tradition more generally, bearing all the methodological caveats of

4 The risk of over-interpretation in terms of content is certainly not the only one facing those who wish to sound out the affinities between Socrates and Aesop. It is well-known that all the fables that Perry collected under 'Aesopica' require meticulous differentiation to clarify exactly which authors are involved, whether Phaedrus, Babrius, or even Ademar. Perry's work shows to some extent where the fable first appears. In this regard, a legitimate methodological question is how far one is justified in treating the Aesopic material as a whole and alternately speaking of either a Platonic-Socratic influence or, conversely, that Socrates/Plato could have drawn on certain fables. This matter demands further investigation, which is beyond my scope here, but I assume as a working hypothesis that even fables that are documented only by later authors are related to the older 'Aesopic' fables, at least in their basic structure, and can therefore be included in the comparison, albeit with strong reservations. On the relationship between Plato and Babrius in particular, see Hawkins 2014 and 2015. For the discussion of λόγος and μῦθος in Babrius, with reference to Plato, see also the contribution of Bottini in this volume.

5 As far as I can ascertain, no one apart from McPherran 2012, 4–11, has attempted such a project, namely to scour the Aesopic fable material systematically seeking out possible Socratic-Platonic sources of inspiration. In his selection of fables, McPherran focuses on themes like the injustice suffered by Socrates from the Athenians, the opposition between injustice and virtue: "The Wolf and the Lamb" (Aesop. 155 P. [= 160 Hsr.; 222 Ch.]); "The Farmer and the Stork" (Aesop. 194 P. [= 208 Hsr.; 285 Ch.]; cf. Babr. 13); "Dr. Heron's Fee" (Aesop. 156 P. [= 161 Hsr.; 225 Ch.]; cf. Babr. 94); "The Mouse and the Frog" (Aesop. 384 P. [= *Vit. Aesop*. 133 G]), or on a few of Socrates' distinguishing features, such as his δαίμων ("The Fir Tree and the Bramble" [Aesop. 304 P. [= Babr. 64]]), or his exterior appearance, which he shared with Aesop ("The Butcher and the Ape" [Aesop. 496 P. [= Phaed. 3.4 Z. [= G.]]), on his polemic against sophistry ("From Cobbler to Physician" [Aesop. 475 P. [= Phaed. 1.14 Z. [= G.]]]), and on his tendency to experience the divine manifesting itself in visions and dreams: "A Statue of Hermes on Sale" (Aesop. 99 P. [= 101 Hsr.; 2 Ch.]). Further works of reference on the poetic background of the *Apology* are Compton 2006, and for Aesop's ethical conception Zafiropoulos 2001.

this approach in mind. It also has to be noted that there is no exact equivalent to the fable told by Socrates in the ancient fable collections of 'Aesopica'.

A specific connection with the overall thematic and dramaturgical context of the *Phaedo* can be acknowledged in fables possibly by referring to the necessity, for Socrates' friends and disciples after his death, to follow the path of philosophical inquiry on their own and always to rely first on the power of reasoning and of judging through *reason*, instead of falling victim to the illusions generated in the human soul by sense perceptions. This could be the case of "Heracles and the Ox-Driver" (Aesop. 291 P. [= Babr. 20]), which could reveal both Socrates' privileged relation to the Gods through *divination*, and his basic conviction that the best way to serve the Gods is to help ourselves by *taking care* of ourselves (scil.: of our ψυχή/νοῦς); in "The North Wind and the Sun" (Aesop. 46 P. [= Hsr.; 73 Ch.]), we could have an allusion to the power of persuasion exerted through reason, a fundamental principle to be considered valid not only for the interlocutors of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, but first and foremost for Socrates himself, who declares he is always persuaded only and exclusively by the λόγος that, subject to all the necessary examination and proof (ἐξετάζειν, ἔλεγχος), is revealed to be *the best*, whatever issue it may concern, and regardless of the listener's or reader's attachment to the speaker and reasoner, because of its *irrefutability* (cf. *Phaedo*, 89d1–91c5; *Crito*, 46b1–47a6).

The absolute necessity to give priority to rational judgment, and to give the highest importance to the goods of the soul, disregarding the apparent goods of the body, is a *leitmotif* of numerous fables, among which I limit myself to references to "Aesop at a Shipyard" (Aesop. 8 P. [= Hsr.; 19 Ch.]), "The Fox and the Leopard" (Aesop. 12 P. [= Hsr.; 37 Ch.]), "A Fox to a Sculpture" (Aesop. 27 P. [= Hsr.; 43 Ch.]), "The Swallow and the other Birds" (Aesop. 39 P. [= Hsr.; 350 Ch.]), and "The Rhetor Demades" (Aesop. 63 P. [= Hsr.; 96 Ch.]).

Much more challenging is the search for fable(s) that may have specifically inspired Socrates in his improvisation, which in the passage of the *Phaedo* culminates in the image of pleasure and pain transformed by the God into a two-headed being. My conjecture is that the material for Socrates' μῦθος could stem from four fables:

The first is "The Man and the Satyr" (Aesop. 35 P. [= Hsr.; 60 Ch.]),[6] which alludes to the presence in man of opposite behaviours, which can therefore hardly be

6 A man is said to have once befriended a satyr, and when winter came and it got cold, the man held his hands in front of his mouth and breathed on them. When the satyr asked him why he was doing this, he replied that he was warming his hands because of the cold. Later, however, a table was set out for them with a very hot meal. The man took it in his hand, brought it to his mouth in small bites and blew on it. When the satyr asked again why he was doing this, he said that he was letting the food cool down because it was very hot. Then the satyr said to him: "Unfortunately, I can no longer maintain

reconciled in the eyes of a satyr; and perhaps it is no coincidence that Socrates is identified with precisely a *Silenus* in the *Symposium* (221d1–222a6), a being who, beyond his insolent and anti-aesthetic appearance, is the only true bearer of λόγοι of divine beauty, which stand out above all other λόγοι for their stringent internal *consistency*. The fable of the encounter between the man and the satyr has thematic parallels with a twofold Socratic *leitmotif*, which pervades literally all the Platonic dialogues in which Socrates is the figure leading the discussion: first, the wholly 'atypical' character of Socrates, to which I will return later, and second, Socrates' art of confronting his interlocutor with his own inconsistency in thinking, speaking, and acting. With specific reference to the *Phaedo*, it is exactly the lack of coherence between speaking and acting that is one of the focal points of the whole 'dramaturgical prologue' of the dialogue: to speak as genuine philosophers do, also implies that one behaves as such, without fearing evils that are only apparent (cf. *Phd.* 61b8–68b6).[7]

The second relevant fable is "The Father and his Daughters" (Aesop. 94 P. [= 96 Hsr.; 300 Ch.]):[8] this fable, showing the impossibility of a *simultaneous* realization of contrary human desires, could be interpreted as a warning to accept the natural alternation of opposite conditions (as in the case of the alternation of seasons), which, according to a rational order that *unifies* them, allows the realization of both wishes, although at different times. In this second case, a very poignant parallel can be found in Plato's conception of the Good in the *Republic*, where τὸ ἀγαθόν is considered not only the ultimate source of knowledge and truth, but also the origin of beauty, virtue, and happiness, thus representing that supreme rational order that governs the alternation of opposites; it is emblematic that the sun is conceived as an ἀνάλογον of the good (all through the famous simile of the sun and the myth of the

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my friendship with you, my dear, because you let the hot and the cold come out of the same mouth." We too must avoid friendship with those whose attitude is ambiguous. (Transl. C.L.).

7 Between the lines, a seemingly 'aporetic' dialogue such as the *Lysis* considers friendship as only possible between like-minded people who are bound together by a desire for the good and the beautiful, i.e. in the ideal case, and in line with the *Phaedo*, those who are virtuous and lovers of wisdom (cf. 217a2–220b5).

8 A father had two daughters, one of whom he gave in marriage to a farmer and the other to a potter. After some time, he came to the farmer's wife and asked her how she was and how things were going for them. She replied that they had everything, she only prayed for one thing to the gods, that it would be winter and that it would start raining so that the vegetables could be watered. Not much later, he also came to the potter's wife and asked her how she was doing. She also said that she didn't really lack anything, she just prayed that the weather would stay good and that the sun would shine so that the clay would dry. So he said to her: "If you ask for good weather and your sister asks for winter rain, which one of you should I pray with?" It is the same with those who do unreconcilable things at the same time, they will of course be harmed in any case. (Transl. C.L.).

cave), being the cause of the alternation of the seasons (cf. 516b4–c2 and 517a8–c4). Shifting from this ethical-cosmological level to the anthropological one, another significant connection with the *Phaedo* surfaces: the pursuit of some expectation or other, some desire or aversion, relying on an opinion of what is best or worst without really knowing it, drags man into a condition of instability and ignorance of the reality of things, and so condemns him to unhappiness; only he who, availing himself of reason, clings to those things that are *not transitory* — again, these are knowledge and virtue — can escape from this abject condition (cf. *Phd*. 79c2–d7).

The third comparable fable is "Preposterous Leadership" (Aesop. 362 P. [= Babr. 134]):[9] the tale of the snake whose tail wants to replace the head in governing the animal, causing only misfortune, is emblematic of the need to leave the guidance of the human being to reason, the only component capable of safeguarding the unity of the whole and of orienting even the irrational components of character towards the good. This fable echoes another Socratic-Platonic *leitmotif*, that of ἀκρασία, i.e. the inner conflict between the desiring or appetitive (ἐπιθυμετικόν), the spirited (θυμοειδές), and the rational (λογιστικόν) aspects of the ψυχή: in the ideal case of the just soul, in which each of its parts practises the virtue that is proper to it under the aegis of reason, we have a perfect ἁρμονία, akin to that of a musical instrument; but when irrational elements predominate, the soul slips into an abyss of ignorance, injustice, and unhappiness (cf. *Resp*. 443b5–444e2; 588b1–592b7).

The fourth and last tale, "War and His Bride" (Aesop. 367 P. [= Babr. 70]),[10] is intriguing, because it refers to marriages that take place by *divine will*, the last in the series being the one between War and Insolence. Although these two natures are not opposite to each other, as in the case of pleasure and pain in our passage in

9 Once a snake's tail decided that the head ought no longer to go first and refused to follow its lead in creeping along. "Let it be my turn now", it said, "to lead the way." "Keep still", said the other members, "how can you lead us, poor wretch, without any eyes or nose, the means by which all living creatures move on their way and guide each limb?" However, they could not dissuade the tail from its purpose, and the rational part of the body succumbed to the irrational. Thereafter, the hinder parts ruled the foremost ones; the tail became the leader, dragging the whole body along in blind motion. When it fell into a hollow pit and bruised its spine on the sharp rocks, the tail, which had been so self-willed before, became submissive and turned to supplication saying: "Mistress head, save us, if you will. It was an evil strife that I ventured on, and evil has been the consequence. If you'll put me where I was at first I'll be more obedient and you'll not worry about getting into trouble again under my leadership." (Transl. Perry).

10 When the gods were marrying and each had been joined with a mate, after all the others came War, whose turn to choose was last in the drawing of the lots. He married Insolence, who alone was left for him to take. The love he felt for her was most unusual, so they say, and even now he follows everywhere she goes. Thus, let not Insolence ever come among the nations or cities of men, finding favor with the crowd; for after her, straightaway War will be at hand. (Transl. Perry).

the *Phaedo*, the *divine* nature of their *bond* implies that none of the two ever appears without also bringing the other along. While the link to the inseparability of pleasure and pain here is striking, the reference to the fact that their union is the result of a 'divine act' is much less obvious: on closer inspection, God intervenes to bind pleasure and pain together by the head, without being able to reconcile them, just as war and insolence are bound in a divine marriage without being annihilated; one might detect here a resonance with the relationship between reason and necessity, between νοῦς and ἀνάγκη, central to the Platonic cosmology of the *Timaeus*, and which at the microcosmic level, returning to the *Phaedo*, translates into reliance on the divine — in itself and in us — as that which has the power to raise man above the incessant play of opposites, by understanding their causes (cf. *Phd.* 62b1–63c7 for the conception that we are an ownership of the Gods, κτῆμα θεῶν).

It is obvious, though, that to bring out all the affinities of these fables with the Socratic-Platonic myth of the *Phaedo* in content and argumentation would require a detailed and systematic analysis of the Aesopic fable material, which, for the sake of brevity, I have only been able to mention here. But I would like to offer a few more words on a further, in my opinion even deeper layer, at which the essential similarities between Aesop and Socrates emerge, a layer that may reasonably have prompted Plato *to stage* the Socratic versification episode: this is the *meta-poetic* and *meta-dialogical* dimension of the impact exerted by Aesop and Socrates on their audience, meaning by 'audience' both the readership of the two authors and, in the case of the Platonic dialogues, the audience of figures present at the discussion and Socrates' dialogue partners.

If I am not mistaken, what the λόγοι and μῦθοι[11] of Aesop and Socrates have fundamentally in common is, in their reception, *the mixture of pleasure and pain*: the pleasure of listening to them, which attracts and enchants by binding its audience to them, is inseparably linked to the pain one feels in seeing oneself discovered, laid bare, in one's contradictions, which feed on vice, the fruit of ignorance.[12]

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11 I intentionally attribute here the use of both λόγοι and μῦθοι to both Socrates and Aesop, to avoid surreptitious splits that would go against Plato's intention to assimilate mythical-fable components into his philosophy, and would also collide with the ethical-intellectual message immanent to the Aesopic fable material. I refer to Bottini's chapter in this volume both for the terminological interchangeability of λόγος and μῦθος in the ancient tradition, and at the same time for their possible differentiation in terms of "semantic content" and the transposition of this into "literary narrative", respectively, as well as for the status of μῦθος as "quasi-λόγος", thus also capable of becoming a bearer of truth.

12 This *elenctic* undressing of one's interlocutor is a distinctive feature of Socratic διαλέγεσθαι, especially in the *Euthyphro*, the two *Hippias*, the *First Alcibiades*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Gorgias*. An exemplary case of the *coexistence* of the *pleasure* derived from the communion with Socratic λόγοι and

In this perspective, both Aesop and Socrates offer themselves to us, primarily, as two very lucid *anthropologists*, who put their finger right on the sore spot of human weaknesses. These inconsistencies of ours, as physiological manifestations of mortal human nature, are the source of incessant inner conflicts, just like the two beings in perpetual struggle in the tale told in the *Phaedo*. Secondly, the fact that these internal oppositions are subsequently "united by the head" through *divine intervention*, may mean that the Aesopic and Socratic λόγοι and μῦθοι, in the first instance, are capable of bringing these same contradictions up to the level of *consciousness* of a listener-reader who has even a minimal willingness to absorb and ponder them. In the second instance, "union by the head" may be suggestive of the fact that the human being is not without hope of recovery: a resolving of contradictions is possible, in the highly *intellectualistic* Aesopic-Socratic perspective, but only by definitively relinquishing the illusions generated by false opinions and leading a life oriented towards the attainment of virtue under the guidance of reason (ἀρετὴ μετὰ φρονήσεως; cf. *Phd.* 68b8–69d2).

However, one might ask: "Why, though, does Socrates improvise on Aesop nowhere other than in the *Phaedo*, whereas his argumentative style and method and its effects run through all the dialogues in which he is the protagonist like an Ariadne's thread?" I would guess that this happens because the link between pleasure and pain becomes emblematic of the *deepest contradiction* intrinsic to human nature: the pleasure of living and the pain of having to die, the love of life and the fear of death. And in a *pamphlet*, such as the *Phaedo*, in defence of philosophy and of the man who, in Plato's eyes, practised it in the most sublime way, Socrates, it becomes even more urgent to show that love of wisdom and fear of death cannot and must not go hand in hand, if one wants to behave as a true philosopher (*Phd.* 66b2).

4 Socrates' λέγειν in the *Phaedo* at the crossroads of μῦθος and λόγος

This second section of my paper has two closely interconnected goals, which I will therefore attempt to pursue at the same time: the first objective is to show that the recourse to Aesopic imagery plays a fundamental role not only at the very beginning of the *Phaedo*, but within the argumentative and dramaturgical structure of the whole dialogue. The second aim is to clarify that, contrary to the first impression

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the intolerable *pain* produced by listening to these same λόγοι in those who have betrayed themselves to chase only apparent goods is that of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (215a3–222b7).

conveyed by Socrates' claim that he does not consider himself a μυθολογικός, Plato here does not intend to draw a clear-cut demarcation between rational discourse and the narration of verisimilar fables, nor does he attempt to devalue the literary genre of fables as regards its potential to capture the core of philosophical truth.[13]

Plato's aim, in line with his urge to raise the figure of his master Socrates to an absolute *paradigm* of philosophical theory and practice, is rather to create, out of love for his philosophical life-master, *a new, common genre* that can synthesize both λόγος and μῦθος.[14]

To achieve this twofold purpose, I will focus, within the Platonic conception of λόγος in general, on the peculiarities of Socrates' λόγος in the *Phaedo*. A consideration of the poignancy of the Socratic λόγος in this context, observing it from a metadialogical perspective, will allow, on the one hand, to acknowledge Plato's complete assimilation as a philosophical writer of a fable template of Aesopic origin, and to highlight both its central role within the creation of the dramaturgical framework of the *Phaedo*, and its double significance within the rhetorical strategy adopted in the dialogue: on the one hand, the intensification of the effect of Socrates' discourse on those present and on the reader; in this very constellation, the Socratic λόγος reveals the possession of the rare gift of communicating both in the form of philosophical discourse or argumentation and in the form of mythical fable. On the other hand, the adaptation of the Aesopic-inspired μῦθος contributes to the production of a literary apology of Socrates as philosopher and as man, destined to remind us of his greatness and coherence for generations to come.

"What is it that the man said before his death? And how did he die?" (Τί οὖν δή ἐστιν ἅττα εἶπεν ὁ ἀνὴρ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; καὶ πῶς ἐτελεύτα, *Phd.* 57a5–6). With this question of Echecrates to Phaedo begins a part of the 'action', which will later lead, in the narrated dialogue, to the detailed account of the events that occurred in prison in Athens on the day of Socrates' death. To ask about the λόγος of Socrates, is to ask about the *central issue* of the dialogue, of even greater importance than its well-known theoretical contents, namely the proofs of the immortality of the soul and the even more popular Platonic theory of ideas.

Right before Socrates' death at the end of the dialogue, plenty of space and emphasis is given to two of his fundamental principles: the absolute necessity of the

13 Some of the reflections in this section are a further elaboration of Luchetti 2020, in which the analysis of the Socratic λόγοι in the *Phaedo* was, however, geared towards showing its connection to the idea of the Good and self-knowledge in the context of Platonic thought.

14 I find myself in perfect agreement with the methodological reflections and the overall approach of Zafiropoulos 2015. For a similarly non-conflicting approach to the relationship between λόγος and μῦθος, see also Dorter's commentary to the *Phaedo* 1982.

care of the soul, of the ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς (115b5–8);[15] and the identity, in the act of one's own dialoguing and bringing order into speeches, of the self with the dialogant/dialoguing-soul, not with the body that will soon be lifeless:[16]

> Γελάσας δὲ ἅμα ἡσυχῇ καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀποβλέψας εἶπεν· "Οὐ πείθω, ὦ ἄνδρες, Κρίτωνα, ὡς ἐγώ εἰμι οὗτος Σωκράτης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάττων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων, ἀλλ' οἴεταί με ἐκεῖνον εἶναι ὃν ὄψεται ὀλίγον ὕστερον νεκρόν, καὶ ἐρωτᾷ δὴ πῶς με θάπτῃ".
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 115c5–d2)

> Smiling quietly, and simultaneously turning his gaze to us, he said: "I cannot convince Crito, friends, that I am this Socrates who is now talking to you, putting each of the discourses in order, but he believes that I am the one he will shortly after see dead, and asks me how he should bury me."
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

In a much less conscious manner, it is Phaedo, at the very beginning of the dialogue, who reports to Echecrates the quite surprising (ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος, 58e1) and out-of-the-ordinary state of mind (ἀτεχνῶς ἄτοπόν τί μοι πάθος παρῆν, 59a4–5) generated in him by the presence of Socrates, who, though aware of his imminent death, not only did not show any sign of disturbance, but even appeared to be happy (εὐδαίμων). And in this disposition, his *character* and his λόγος are an inseparable *unity*:

> εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, ὥστε μοι ἐκεῖνον παρίστασθαι μηδ' εἰς Ἅιδου ἰόντα ἄνευ θείας μοίρας ἰέναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενον εὖ πράξειν εἴπερ τις πώποτε καὶ ἄλλος.
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 58e3–59a1)

> He appeared to me a happy man, O Echecrates, both in behaviour and in words, so serenely and nobly did he die; such that it aroused in me the vision of one who, though going to Hades, would not go there without a divine destiny, and that once he arrived there, he would be well, as never any other.
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

As we can see, what matters from the beginning to the end of the *Phaedo* is the inner condition of Socrates, which is inseparable from the dimension of his διαλέγεσθαι.

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15 For the crucial importance of the theme of soul-care, see especially *Ap.* 29d7–42a5 and *Alc. I* 127d9–129a1.

16 The separation, dissolution, and purification (χωρισμός, λύσις, κάθαρσις) of the soul from the body is the precondition of a right philosophizing in *Phd.* 64b7–c8 and especially 67c5–68b4. For the identification of the true self with the soul, cf. *Alc. I* 130c1–e6.

Therefore, repeatedly asking what Socrates said — Τί [...] ἐστιν ἄττα εἶπεν and πῶς ἐτελεύτα (57a5–6), and also further on in 58c6–7 τί ἦν τὰ λεχθέντα καὶ πραχθέντα [...]; and again in 59c7 τίνες φῂς ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι; — does not simply represent a literary *escamotage*, but rather responds to a precise communicative requirement of Plato: to catalyse attention from the very beginning of the *Phaedo* on the essential link between the *man* Socrates and his λέγειν.[17] It is a speech around which the entire dramaturgical and argumentative structure of the *Phaedo* is built and revolves.

To understand the scope of the operation carried out in the *Phaedo* — that is the fusion in Socrates, so to speak, of man and λόγος as an exemplary manifestation of the unity of philosophical theory and praxis — it is useful to carry out a brief reflection by conceptually taking a step backwards, as it were.

In the Platonic dialogues we are faced with at least two possible ways of considering λόγος in its relationship with reality: first we have a λόγος-image, capable at best of approximating a faithful representation of the nature of things, but still destined to establish with it no more than a relationship of similarity and dissimilarity.[18]

However, there is also a second dimension of λόγος, an 'ideal' dimension, so to speak, that of the λόγος-paradigm, which is an essential trait and the very structure of that nature that the λόγος-image attempts to reproduce.[19] This second vision, which has so far been given too little consideration among modern scholars, is attested in the emblematic case of the theorization of true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, grounded both in the vision of λόγος as a living organism (cf. 264c2–5), and in the immense knowledge of the human soul that the philosopher-dialectician has at his disposal. The *ideal rhetor* cannot but coincide with the φιλόσοφος-διαλεκτικός: his λόγοι presuppose knowledge of the truth of what they express.

In cases such as these, λόγος ceases to be a mere "reproduction of [...]", to be mimetic, as it were, in a trivial sense, and becomes, while maintaining its discursive structure, an immediate interpretation of the intelligible order, acting as a creative force, as a *poiesis*, originating directly from its own source.

This λόγος-paradigm finds its highest expression in the Socratic λόγοι and διαλέγεσθαι, as Plato portrays them in his dialogues. The reason for this is that Socrates

17 See also Abricka 1982, 191–195.

18 Of this first conception we have the well-known examples in the *Cratylus* (cf. 388b13–391b7 and 431a7–433a2), in Book 5 of the *Republic* (cf. 479c3–5), and in the *Sophist* (cf. 262d2–263d4).

19 For the existence of divine as well as human λόγοι, see also *Phdr*. 259b5–d9. – To the best of my knowledge, the only modern interpreter who has investigated the Platonic conception of an ideal λόγος, with special regard to the link between language and dialectic in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist*, is Mikecin 2016, 99–101, 110–113.

embodies the philosopher *par excellence*, not understood abstractly as a purely conceptual model, but as a *unity* of philosophy and life, ideal and concrete at the same time, a unity that Plato conveys to us in its unfolding. From my viewpoint, the most significant material in terms of an ability to present us Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος in its deep complexity and completeness is precisely the *Phaedo*.[20]

In the *Phaedo*, it is the imminent death of Socrates that amplifies the power of his λόγος, enhancing its emblematic character, which makes it different from any other, *unique*, and profoundly *atypical*. The clues of this radical otherness are to be found scattered throughout the dialogue.[21]

The first clue in chronological order, and the most significant due to its connection with the reference to Aesop, concerns the *effect* of the unity of Socrates with his λόγος on the audience: Phaedo (58e1), and with him all the co-participants in the event (59a1–b1), are seized by an astonishing and atypical feeling, by a θαῦμα and an ἀτοπία that become manifest precisely in that *mixture of pleasure and pain* that constitute the material of the fable of the two beings bound by the God by the head, recounted in an Aesopic context (58e1–59b4).[22]

We know from other dialogical contexts that the rare ability to amaze (θαυμάζειν) and be out of the ordinary, ἄτοπος, are essential traits of the man Socrates that are immediately reflected in his φιλοσοφεῖν, and that his λόγοι act so profoundly as to generate in his listeners exactly the same kind of extraordinary and marvellous state, which is the precondition for awakening in themselves a true

20 For the dialogues prior to the *Phaedo*, I wish to recall the latest work, published posthumously, of my first Maestro, Gabriele Giannantoni 2005. For a wide-ranging and stimulating analysis of the Socratic dialogue, which highlights its character as a philosophical practice par excellence, I limit myself here, among the most recent research, to a reference to Sassi 2015 and Napolitano Valditara 2018, both providing a rich and up-to-date bibliography.

21 The peculiar depth of the Socratic λογός in the *Phaedo* is further corroborated if we consider that, in terms of the dramaturgical framework of the dialogues in which Socrates is the protagonist or still plays a pivotal role, the *Phaedo*, precisely because of the events it narrates, is the last.

22 While most modern interpreters of the Platonic dialogues, and of the *Phaedo* in particular, focus their full attention on their theoretical core, it is marginalia such as these that give the measure of the philosophical and human splendour diffused by Socrates' presence, allowing the theoretical sections of the dialogues to be read at an even deeper level. – On the value in Platonic writings of seemingly insignificant details, see Schleiermacher's *Einleitung* with its famous thesis of the identity between form and content in the dialogues 1855, 5–36. For a divergent perspective on the overall interpretation of Platonic thought, but akin to this in terms of the emphasis on the dramaturgical framework of the dialogue for an accurate understanding of its philosophical content, see Szlezák 1985. – Zafiropoulos 2015, 13–22, likewise, makes these marginalia one of the cornerstones of his hermeneutic approach to the *Phaedo*.

'inner Socrates', a daimonic consciousness (δαίμων), which a genuine lover of wisdom cannot do without.[23]

If we carefully consider the condition of Phaedo and everyone present, the unusual mixture of pleasure and pain, the pleasure of listening to Socrates and talking philosophy with him as usual, and the pain that anticipates the imminent loss of the friend, a pain that hides within itself a good dose of self-pity (cf. 117c3–d1), we realize how much this attitude affects the course of the dialogue, due to its dangerously anti-philosophical character.

The death of the philosopher, experienced as an irreversible event, not only raises, both theoretically and practically, and both generally and individually, the question of the end of what is ordinarily called "life", constituting the premise of the question about the soul's immortality. Above all, it evokes a long line of personal fears and uncertainties that culminate dramatically in the conviction that, once Socrates is dead, no one will be able to soothe them (cf. 78a1–2) to prevent them from being projected onto λόγοι as the privileged instrument of the search for truth. The result of this is that, doubting the existence of a λόγος that is stable and true, the potential genuine philosophers run the risk of turning inexorably into "misologists" (μισόλογοι, 89d1 and cf. 89d1–90d7). The very high risk is therefore that the death of Socrates will turn into the death of philosophy itself.

Socrates' therapeutic action, the way in which he puts the principle of self-care into practice (θεραπεία ψυχῆς, 62d4, 64e6; ἐπιμέλεια ψυχῆς, 62b7, d2, d7, 107c2, 115b6), intervenes immediately: first in reflecting on the reciprocal implication of pleasure and pain at the bodily level, with the aim of emphasizing their transitoriness and scaling down their sphere of influence (cf. 60b3–c7); then, in showing their dangerousness insofar as they induce the soul to believe true what the body tells it to be true, distracting it, and, by making it a lover of the corporeal, estranging it from philosophy (cf. 83b2–e3).

Therefore, at a deeper level, the Aesopic template of which Socrates offers us a variation goes far beyond the limits of the reference with which the *Phaedo* began, being instead part of the *argumentative strategy* that pervades the dialogue *as a whole*. Socrates provides first and foremost an account of the immortality of λόγοι, and not only in the obvious sense in which the philosophical dialogue of those present and the interested reader is of course able to continue after his death.

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23 I have already mentioned the description of Socrates and its effects in Alcibiades' exemplary speech in the *Symposium*. For the famous daimonic sign, see the *Apology* (cf. 27b9–28a1; 31c4–32a3; 39e1–40c3) and *Hippias Major* (cf. 292c3–293e7). – On the 'daimonic consciousness' and its relevance for a systematic inquiry on the bond between Socrates and Aesop, see Zafiropoulos 2015, 66–73. On Socrates' eccentricity as an essential trait of the true philosopher, see Sassi 2015, 3–13.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates embodies, in first person, through his διάλογος, the defence of philosophy itself, with the aim of providing his audience and the reader with the tools to access it in turn. From a *protreptic* perspective, the path clearly indicated in the *Phaedo* is that of the mimesis of Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος, which means of the μίμησις Σωκράτους.[24] We can understand this very well by bearing in mind that the therapeutic aim of Socrates' λόγος in the *Phaedo* is primarily to generate the conditions for a διαλέγεσθαι that the soul can conduct itself with itself. The result of this λόγος is the unfolding for the psyche of the only perspective in life — both earthly life and the afterlife — that is in accordance with its nature: the life pursued according to virtue accompanied by intelligence (ἀρετὴ μετὰ φρονήσεως; 69a10, b3, b6, c2; 111b4; 114c7). Only Socrates' λόγοι are endowed with the power to lead the soul to its goal, to virtue that arises from intelligence, and thus to happiness, εὐδαιμονία (58e3; 81a6; 82a10, b4; 111a3, c3; 115d4).[25]

As a philosophical writer, Plato skilfully interweaves the literary genres of fable and philosophy, presenting us with a Socrates who, in his Aesopic-inspired improvisation in the *Phaedo* 60b1–c7, not only embodies the prototype of the philosopher who interprets fables and creates them in turn, but, on a dramaturgical level, literally *embodies* the very content of his own improvisation: it is precisely the psychological attitude of Socrates and his argumentative style, like a bridge astride literary genres, that produce the mixture of pleasure and pain which disorients and challenges his listeners (and readers), confronting them with their own human weakness, which in the *Phaedo* is expressed in the tension between an 'ordinary' life and a philosophical life.

5 Socratic λόγος as a synthesis of λόγος and μῦθος

But what kind of λόγος is Socrates' λόγος? The answer in the *Phaedo* is crystal clear: in pursuing his therapeutic aim, Socrates uses λόγος in all its semantic breadth: he

24 Ultimately, this is the fusion of Socratic διαλέγεσθαι and φιλοσοφεῖν that had already been announced in the *Apology*, in Socrates' wish to continue both of them even 'after death' (cf. 40e4–41c7; 37e3–38a8), and which here in the *Phaedo* is grasped in all its literary and theoretical depth. This is a point on which I find I distance myself from the overall thesis of Kurke 2006. There are indeed some contexts, such as the familiar one in the *Republic*, in which specific forms of mimesis are subjected to harsh criticism by Plato. In the constellation of the *Phaedo*, however, according to the *meta-dialogical* approach I have adopted here, it seems to me that the genre of μῦθος is perfectly in tune with Plato's main literary and philosophical concern, i.e. *the mimesis of Socrates*.

25 See also Blößner 2001.

speaks both as λογικός, using demonstrative arguments and outlining scientific methods of investigation (such as the hypothetical method, cf. 101c9–e3), and as μυθολογικός (although he initially declares that he is not, cf. 61a4–b8), narrating a beautiful myth "worthy of being heard" at the end of the dialogue (110b1, c4), and finally as a good enchanter, ἀγαθὸς ἐπῳδός (78a1 and cf. 114d6–7).

Even though Socrates himself, in his full awareness of the distinction between the two communicative modalities of λόγος and μῦθος (60c–d; 61b4), points out how inappropriate it would be for those in possession of insight (νοῦς) to take 'the whole' content (i.e. every single detail) of the great final eschatological myth literally (cf. 114d1–7), it seems clear that he in no way intends to argue for a clear-cut demarcation between the two forms of communication in terms of the superiority or inferiority of one over the other, as regards the ability of both to convey the core of philosophical *truth* (cf. 70b5–7; 77c6–78a9; 94d6–e1). The fact that Socrates had in mind from the outset both a scientific investigation and the narration of myths is made clear in 61e1–2, where he plans both to *inquire* and to *tell stories* about the journey and the sojourn (of the soul) in the beyond (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ.).[26]

A marked separation, on the one hand between short discourse, logical-dialectical and scientific argumentation (βραχυλογία, διαλεκτική-ἐπιστήμη, σκέψις, λόγος), and on the other hand between long discourse, rhetorical argumentation, and mythical narration (μακρολογία, ῥητορική, μῦθος), is only marginally recognizable in the *Phaedo*. Far more evident and incisive are the overlaps, not to say exact coincidences, between the logical and mythological forms of communication. Therefore, it is more realistic and more correct to see in the Socratic discourse a higher communicative structure, an *ideal*, *eidetic* λόγος that stands above the differentiation μῦθος-λόγος as a higher *unity* and a *unifying narrative principle*.

As far as I can see, Plato creates a *new* genre, which is not that of philosophy as opposed to poetry or storytelling, nor does he intend to mark the definitive

26 Certainly, it would be necessary and desirable if one could succeed in establishing a clear distinction, within the recourse Plato makes of μῦθος, between species of it, so as to be able to verify which of them present elements of greater affinity with the Aesopic fable material, both in terms of form and content. Since I cannot go into the subject in depth here, my considerations here are of a general kind, and referring to the great final eschatological myth of the *Phaedo*, I am thinking of the interconnection between the fable-like character of its content and the ethical-intellectual message that Socrates' rhetorical art in narrating it conveys. An interconnection that in my opinion is very close to the intentions of Aesop's fables. For the extensive bibliography on λόγος and μῦθος in the Platonic dialogues, see Cerri 1991; Cürsgen 2002; Janka/Schäfer 2002. For their complementarity and the philosophical relevance of myth, among others, Gaiser 1984, 125–152. On the *Phaedo* in particular, see Krummen 2012.

overcoming of myth in rational reasoning, nor does this new genre set out to establish itself as a genre in competition with Aesop as a possible forerunner of Plato's mimetic prose.[27]

Like in the *Phaedrus* (cf. 259e1–260d9), we have, in the unfolding of the διαλέγεσθαι of the true philosopher Socrates, the most genuine expression of the *true art of rhetoric*, which only he who has oriented his life to the perennial search for truth and the Good is capable of exercising. In this kind of λόγος, logical argumentation, ἀπόδειξις, science, and μῦθος meet and mutually complement each other. Socrates, as the generative force of this highly productive λόγος, *poietic and mimetic* in the most sublime sense of the word, considers in each phase of the dialogue the dynamics of interaction with his interlocutors and their reactions, and establishes when and in what specific form to transmit the core of his philosophical message.

Socrates is a good fear-enchanter, an ἀγαθὸς ἐπῳδός (for the beautiful image of the "little child" in the soul in need of reassurance, cf. *Phd*. 77d5–78a9), because his διαλέγεσθαι is a perpetual bewitchment,[28] an ἐπῳδή that, *transcending* the distinction between logical and mythical narrative form, is simultaneously immanent to both his speaking as λογικός and as μυθολογικός.

Socrates's λόγος, therefore, overcomes that lower level of mimesis, that of the λόγος-image, irremediably dissimilar from what it wants to signify and therefore potentially susceptible to incessant variations. This kind of λόγος, in fact, is still *detached* from the soul that generates it, while the paradigmatic λόγος of Socrates, elevated by Plato to the only true ποιητής, springs directly — and herein lies its power of persuasion and enchantment — from a soul that understands and constantly practises in first person what it considers to be the highest Good, μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, φιλοσοφία as the highest music (μεγίστη μουσική, 61a3–4), showing us all, I would say, the way to attain it ourselves.

Plato, as we can see, consequently resorts to the Socratic improvisation on an Aesopic fable pattern as a *leitmotif* that runs through the entire *Phaedo*, which enables him to let Socrates pronounce, in first person, the core message of the dialogue: the need to think and act in accordance with intelligence as the only possible dimension of overcoming human contradictions.

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27 Let us not forget that the *Phaedo* is one of the three dialogues, alongside the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in which Plato makes massive use of Orphic-Dionysian and, above all, Eleusinian religious content, hinging core theoretical themes precisely on their respective foundation myths. For this background in mystery religion, impressive in the *Phaedo*, see especially Graf 1974, Alt 1982, Kingsley 1995, and Lavecchia 1999.

28 For Socrates as Asclepiades, cf. in addition to *Phd*. 118a6–8, also *Phdr*. 270c1–e5 and *Chrm*. 155e5–157d7.

I would be tempted to read, in this heartfelt invitation to give an ethical orientation to human life, conveyed through a discursive and narrative structure in which the philosophical and fable genre come together, the Platonic equivalent of the *fabula docet*.

6 Conclusion

To conclude this analysis, I wish, while continuing to hold a Platonic viewpoint, to draw on the overarching topic of genre, addressing more explicitly the question of the interplay between philosophical writing and fable. This issue can be approached by raising two questions, the first of which concerns the influence of philosophical writing on fable, and the second the functions that fable fulfils in philosophical writing.

Starting with the first question and contextualizing it in the *Phaedo*, we can follow the path from an initial juxtaposition between λόγος and μῦθος (*Phd*. 61b3–5) to their interchangeability, resulting from the assimilation of the Aesopic-inspired pattern of the bond between pleasure and pain within the dramaturgical framework of the dialogue, up to the overlapping of μῦθος into λόγος, stigmatized by a Socrates speaking simultaneously as λογικός and μυθολογικός. I would therefore be inclined to think, on the one hand, that Plato attributes to the fable genre the same capacity of *truth-telling* characteristic of λόγος — more exactly, that he credits it with possessing a λόγος of its own — and, on the other hand, that he resorts to mythical fictionalization to transpose the philosophical conceptual core into a narrative form not only didactically more accessible, but also more incisive in its psychological effect on the listener/reader. If my cursory reconstruction is correct, it is reasonable to assume an influence from Platonic philosophy, especially in relation to its communicative modalities, on the literary genre of fable.[29]

As for the second question, it seems to me to emerge clearly from the *Phaedo* how the philosophical genre benefited from the fable genre: from a *meta-dialogical*

29 I agree here completely with Bottini, who in his analysis of the λόγος-μῦθος relationship in Babrius, in connection with the myth of Cronos' era in Plato's *Statesman*, highlights the presence of λόγος, with which Babrius'μῦθοι would be imbued, even beyond the limits of the *fabula docet*, thus bringing to light a process of mythification of λόγος itself. An issue that would merit further investigation is the Platonic use of μῦθος as representative of the highest manifestation — both in form and content — of rational knowledge (λόγος), namely intuitive, noetic knowledge (νόησις-νοῦς). I have begun to analyse this phenomenon in a philosophical setting in a study of the *Phaedrus* (Luchetti 2023).

perspective, the recourse to mythical-fable as a communicative tool of Aesopic provenance enabled Plato to enhance the *depth* and *impact* of his philosophical message by embedding it in an *apologetic-didactic* context, tailor-made to honour the Master Socrates.[30]

To conclude: in offering to those present and to his readers a charming variation on fable patterns inspired by the Aesopic tradition, Socrates 'practises' from the very beginning of the *Phaedo* his διαλέγεσθαι as the privileged instrument of the ἐπιμέλεια and θεραπεία ψυχῆς. By setting before our eyes the image of the two serpents tied by the head, the head clearly becomes the symbol of the Socratic διάλογος, performed in the *Phaedo*, as the only practice able *to unify* the oppositions that drive the soul into conflict with itself, reconciling it with itself, and to quell the fears that, by dominating it, draw it away from philosophy.

If I am right, this shows us that Aesop in the *Phaedo* does not represent a purely literary device, condemned to be annihilated in Plato's creation of the genre of philosophy understood as superior to and purified of mythical issues. If I have correctly interpreted the Platonic intention to create, out of love for Socrates, a *new kind* of λόγος, an *ideal* λόγος, *synthesizing* λόγος and μῦθος, the presence of Aesop must rather suggest a complete *assimilation* of the narrative models of his fables, such as those that Socrates claimed to have had at hand, with the aim of making them a fundamental, structural component of Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος.[31]

In line with Plato's wish to gift us the *Phaedo* as a literary monument in memory of Socrates and, simultaneously, a defence of philosophy, it also becomes clear that, just as in the *Phaedrus* the ideal rhetor is revealed to be the philosopher-dialectician, so in the *Phaedo* it is the *true* philosopher, λογικός and μυθολογικός at once, who reveals himself to be the true "fabulator".

30 In this contribution, for the sake of brevity, I have mainly focused on the influence of the Aesopic-inspired mythologeme on the *Phaedo*'s dramaturgical framework and contents, considering these in Plato's meta-dialogical perspective as a philosophical writer. It is my conviction, however, that a broader investigation of the *Phaedo* would reveal how the significance of the μῦθος — which takes its cue from the link between the opposites of pleasure and pain — also strongly affects what at a superficial glance would appear to be the least mythical and by far the most logical part of the dialogue, dedicated to the famous demonstrations supporting the soul's immortality; these, without exception, all unfold around the relationship between opposites (ἐναντία).

31 Of course, it would be interesting to systematically sound out the Platonic dialogues and Socratic literature (Xenophon, the Minor Socratics), to ascertain to what extent Socrates or other characters employ fables, anecdotes, or similar in their argumentation. A striking, but still to be investigated recourse to an image of a fable-like being is one to which I have referred before, namely the chimera as an image of the human soul in Book 9 of the *Republic* (cf. 588b1–592b7).

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Vittorio Bottini

From λόγος to μῦθος: Babrius' Fabulous Poetics

Abstract: In his prologues, Babrius lays out his conceptualization of the fabulistic genre by juxtaposing μῦθος and λόγος, two terms used to designate "fable" in antiquity. Babrius reaches this goal by interacting with Plato's *Phaedo* (61b) and *Politicus* (272c–d). In Babrius' description of the golden age, animals knew λόγοι similar to what Babrius is telling Branchus in the form of μῦθοι (1 *prol.* 5–7). The change in terminology highlights that when the λόγοι shared between the inhabitants of the golden age are extracted from their original setting, they are told in the form of μῦθοι. Babrius can only recreate these vocal interactions between animals by turning λόγοι into μῦθοι, fictionalizing the ability of animals to talk which was once a reality. The allusions to Plato highlight the value of his fables and their potential to convey serious messages through a process of fictionalization which requires a transformation of λόγος, "discourse about truth", into μῦθος, "fiction".

1 Introduction

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Babrius is "a Greek writer of fables".[1] This statement might seem unproblematic.[2] However, the definition gets more complicated if one tries to pinpoint the meaning behind the generic term "fable", more specifically, what was a fable for Babrius? This question is foundational for the study of Babrius' *Mythiambi*, whose poetics one cannot understand without exploring the author's conceptualization of iambic poetry and

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1 Knowles 2005, s.v. *Babrius*.

2 This being said, one may prefer to define Babrius as a writer of Greek fables, as we are not sure about the origin of the author. See Spielhofer 2023, 12–18.

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fable.[3] While recent studies have explored Babrius' iambic poetry,[4] here I intend to uncover how Babrius understands fables as a genre by analysing Babrius' use of μῦθος and λόγος, two terms used to indicate fables in ancient Greek.[5] Because our author presents his readers with programmatic statements about the nature of his compositions in the prologues to the two books of the *Mythiambi*, my discussion will focus on these two texts.[6]

My contention is that Babrius shapes his definition of the fable genre by interacting with philosophy. This cross-generic relationship is not new: not only did ancient philosophy often utilize fables or fable-like narratives to effectively convey its principles, but fables were also recognized for their ethical insights and educational value.[7] While the *Mythiambi* is not to be deemed a philosophical work per se, Babrius deepens the generic interplay between philosophy and fables by linking his work with philosophical literature, specifically Plato's dialogues. Following in the footsteps of Hawkins, who discussed possible thematic connections between Plato, Callimachus and Babrius, I will further explore this relationship by identifying specific allusions to Plato in Babrius' first prologue. I submit that Babrius interacts with Platonic dialogues, especially the *Politicus* and the *Phaedo*, so as to illustrate the pedagogical value of his μῦθοι while highlighting their potential as fictional and amusing narratives.[8] In this way, the content of Babrius' μῦθοι and their literary form and style are fundamentally intertwined.[9]

3 See Spielhofer 2023, 58. Cf. Hose 2000, 16–17.

4 See Hawkins 2014; 2015; Mann 2018; Spielhofer 2023.

5 See van Dijk 1997, 79–90.

6 For an in-depth discussion of the two prologues, see Spielhofer 2023, 87–123.

7 For example, Aesopic fables are found, e.g. in Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle (see e.g. Holzberg 2002, 12–13). According to Adrados 1999, 604–644, fables also played an important role in the development of Cynic and Stoic thought. On Aesop as a sage and the philosophical relevance of Aesopic fables, see Kurke 2011. Notably, Pliny the Elder (*HN* 36.82) defines Aesop as a *fabellarum philosophus*.

8 The term fiction might be anachronistic in the context of Greek literature. I use it to refer to what Hose 2015, 373, labels the "as if" mode, which modern literature calls "fictionality" and which points to that "agreement between a literary text and its reader that what is depicted in the text is presented in such a way that it (merely) gives the impression of having happened." On the relationship between literature and truth in Greek thought, see Hose 2015 with further bibliography.

9 Hawkins 2015, 315, argues that a thematic relationship between Plato and Babrius should not flag a philosophical dimension in Babrius' fables, as our author is more concerned with matters of form and style. Although Babrius is not a philosopher, he emphasizes the philosophical potential of his fables and engages with philosophical texts.

2 Babrius' second prologue

In both prologues, Babrius defines his own compositions as μῦθοι, not as λόγοι: μυθίαμβον (2 *prol.* 8), μυθιάζομαι (2 *prol.* 13), μυθέομεν (1 *prol.* 7), μύθους (1 *prol.* 16).[10] Let us start with the second prologue, as Babrius gives here a brief history of the genre of the fable. The author contrasts his μῦθοι with Aesopic λόγοι, the first signifying fables in verse, the second fables in prose:

Μῦθος μέν, ὦ παῖ βασιλέως Ἀλεξάνδρου,
Σύρων παλαιῶν ἐστιν εὕρεμ᾽ ἀνθρώπων,
οἳ πρίν ποτ᾽ ἦσαν ἐπὶ Νίνου τε καὶ Βήλου.
πρῶτος δέ, φασίν, εἶπε παισὶν Ἑλλήνων
Αἴσωπος ὁ σοφός, εἶπε καὶ Λιβυστίνοις
λόγους Κυβίσσης. ἀλλ᾽ ἐγὼ νέῃ μούσῃ
δίδωμι καθαρῷ χρυσίῳ χαλινώσας
τὸν μυθίαμβον ὥσπερ ἵππον ὁπλίτην.
ὑπ᾽ ἐμοῦ δὲ πρώτου τῆς θύρης ἀνοιχθείσης
εἰσῆλθον ἄλλοι, καὶ σοφωτέρης μούσης
γρίφοις ὁμοίας ἐκφέρουσι ποιήσεις,
μαθόντες οὐδὲν πλεῖον ἢ με γινώσκειν.
ἐγὼ δὲ λευκῇ μυθιάζομαι ῥήσει,
καὶ τῶν ἰάμβων τοὺς ὀδόντας οὐ θήγω,
ἀλλ᾽ εὖ πυρώσας, εὖ δὲ κέντρα πρηύνας,
ἐκ δευτέρου σοι τήνδε βίβλον ἀείδω.
(Babr. 2 *prol.*)

Fable (μῦθος), son of King Alexander, is the invention of Syrian men of old, who lived once upon a time in the days of Ninus and Belus. Aesop the wise — they say — was the first to tell fables to the sons of the Hellenes, and Cybisses also told fables (λόγους) to the Libyans. But I offer them with a new muse, having bridled my *mythiambos* with pure gold, like a war-horse. I was the first to open the door. Once I did it, others entered and, only having come to know who I am but having learnt nothing else, they publish poems similar to riddles of a more learned muse. But I tell iambic fables in a clear style. Also, I do not sharpen the teeth of

10 In the surviving texts attributed to Babrius, λόγος appears eight times outside of the prologues with the more common meaning of "word" or "speech" (15.12; 44.4; 50.11; 53.3; 95.9; 95.13; 95.37; 136.17). It also appears in three epimythia (12.26; 40.5; 56.8), where it could have the meaning of "fable". However, according to Vaio 2001 and Holzberg 2019, these epimythia are later interpolations. μῦθος appears six times outside of the prologues with the meaning of "word" or "speech" (15.3; 77.3; 103.15; 107.3; 142.2; 143.5). It is also used with the meaning of "fable" in 11 epimythia (18.5; 22.13*; 31.23; 34.14*; 36.13; 38.8*; 59.16*; 96.5*; 107.16*; 116.15*; 119.11), four of which — i.e. those not marked by an asterisk — might be original according to Vaio 2001. There is no original epimythium where Babrius labels his compositions as λόγοι.

> the iambs; but, having tested them well by fire and properly softened their sting, I sing this book for you for the second time.
>
> (Transl. V.B.)

Aesop and Cybisses are said to have composed λόγοι,[11] while in line 8 Babrius' work is qualified as μυθίαμβος, a *hapax legomenon*, which results from the fusion of μῦθος and ἴαμβος. Line 6 has a break in the middle, with ἀλλά creating a strong divide between the λόγοι of Aesop and Cybisses on the one hand, and Babrius' new muse on the other. As others have observed, Babrius here differentiates between his compositions in verse, μῦθος, and Aesopic fables in prose, λόγοι.[12] This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that Babrius highlights the poetic nature of his work by means of the verb ἀείδω (2 *prol.* 16), whereas Aesop's act of narrating fables is described with the verbs εἶπε (2 *prol.* 4) and φράζω (1 *prol.* 16). The choice of these verbs is not random but reflects the fact that Babrius composes verse in contrast to Aesop's prose narratives.

But what about μῦθος at the very beginning of the second prologue referring to the fabulistic activity of (As)syrians?[13] μῦθος here is probably used to represent the whole genre of the fable in the context of its Syrian origin.[14] Babrius' claim that the fable originates from Syria aligns with modern scholarly theories concerning the Near Eastern origin of the genre.[15] Furthermore, it is my contention that the term μῦθος could also refer, more specifically, to the use of verse fables in Mesopotamia.[16] There are ancient Mesopotamian texts, so-called "disputation poems", which feature arguments presented by two speakers trying to establish their preeminence over each other.[17] In these poems, animals, plants, and other usually inarticulate beings compete by means of elaborate arguments.[18] First at-

11 In lines 4–6, I take λόγους as the object of the verb εἶπε in both instances.

12 See Luzzatto 1975, 67, and van Dijk 1997, 90. Theon, a Greek rhetorician (1st/2nd CE), reports that prose writers usually designate λόγοι as "fables", not as μῦθοι (*Prog.* 73 Spengel).

13 For Greek "Syrians" = modern "Assyrians", see Haubold 2013, 122.

14 van Dijk 1997, 86, claims that, in some instances, μῦθος can also indicate the fabulistic genre as a whole. Cf. Strong 2021, 162 n. 99.

15 Cf. Falkowitz 1984; Holzberg 2002, 15–16. For scholarship on Mesopotamian literature picking up on these issues, see Alster 2005, 342–343.

16 The mention of Ninus and Belus sets the birth of fable in a mythological prehistory in the region of Mesopotamia. Belus here refers to the West Semitic god Baal, worshipped in Syria and the Levant, while Ninus refers to Baal's mythical son, the founder of the Assyrian city of Nineveh. For Ninus and Belus, see Hdt. 1.7; Ctes. *fr.* F1a Lenfant, Castor of Rhodes (*FGrH* 250 F 1–2).

17 On these poems, see Jiménez 2017 with further bibliography.

18 Disputation poems had been traditionally classified as a type of fable by e.g. Ebeling 1927; Williams 1956; Lambert 1960, 150. Other scholars of Near Eastern literature disagree, as these

tested on cuneiform tablets written in Sumerian and Akkadian languages in the 18th century BCE, they boast a long tradition.[19] These disputations are poetic, usually written in verse,[20] and have been received in the Greek literary tradition. For example, Callimachus' *Iambi* 4 revolves around the disputation of a bramble, a laurel and an olive tree. As has been noted, this poem has a Babylonian analogue in the disputation of *The Date Palm and the Tamarisk*.[21] Furthermore, it is worth considering the case of the *Etana*, a Babylonian mythological poem, into whose narrative a fable featuring a snake and an eagle is embedded. Even more interestingly, the *Etana* and its fable have been found to be a relevant precedent for Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle".[22]

The idea that Babrius might be aware of a tradition of Babylonian fables in verse is corroborated by some further observations on a particular fable by Babrius. Babr. 84, a story of a gnat and bull, also survives in two other versions: one in the *Collectio Augustana* (Aesop. 137 P. [= 140 Hsr.; 190 Ch.]) and the other in the works of the Greek poet Mesomedes of Crete (11 Heitsch, *c.* 2nd century CE). However, all these fables have their main precedent in a Mesopotamian fable attested on a Babylonian tablet datable to 716 BCE:[23] the poem of "The Poor, Forlorn Wren".[24] This case of transmission between the Mesopotamian and the Greek

poems contain almost no narration, only dialogue: see Bottéro 1991, 8; Vanstiphout 1997, 581 n. 2; Jiménez 2017, 11. However, narration is not essential in Greek fables (cf. e.g. Babr. 109). Moreover, there are disputation poems where narration is interwoven with the dialogue such as the *Bird and Fish* and the *Series of the Fox*. The taxonomy of disputation poems is a modern concern, which most likely did not prevent an ancient audience from noticing their similarities with fables. Furthermore, the reception of this material in the Greek sphere suggests that these texts were at least related to the type of texts which we now call fables.

19 Jiménez 2017, 3.

20 The distinction of prose versus verse is not always as straightforward in Akkadian as in Classical literature. Cf. Wasserman 2002, 158: "Akkadian literary texts were not normally constructed following a single obligatory metric or prosodic form." Rather, Akkadian verse "interweaves syntactic structure with basic semantic units, mostly within the boundaries of a single line or a couplet" (162). On features of Akkadian poetry, see also Jiménez 2017, 72–76 with further bibliography.

21 As Jiménez 2017, 132 observes, "both its topic and its structure […] are strongly reminiscent of the Mesopotamian disputations". Interestingly, not only does Callimachus claim that his narrative is from the Lydians of old (οἱ πάλαι Λυδοί, Callim. *Ia.* 4.7), but he brands his iambic disputation poem as a fabulistic narrative by means of the noun αἶνος, one of the words used for fables in Greek (ἄκουιε δὴ τὸν αἶνον, "Indeed hear the fable", Callim. *Ia.* 4.6).

22 See Currie 2021.

23 For Haubold 2013, 27 this text and the Greek fables are plainly related.

24 See Jiménez 2017, 327–373 who refers to it as a poem (e.g. 330). The case of this story is tricky as there is hardly a complete surviving line, so we cannot properly check that it follows all the

fabulistic tradition has been thoroughly studied.[25] In particular, it was noticed that the Babrian fable closely corresponds to the Babylonian text, not just on thematic, but also on lexical-stylistic and formal-narrative levels.[26]

In my view, these parallels constitute a compelling case for Babrius' familiarity with Mesopotamian fable-like poetic literature. I recognize the risks of asserting a direct influence of Near Eastern literature on Babrius, as it inevitably raises the complex and possibly unanswerable question of the exact nature of their relationship.[27] Indeed, we cannot determine with certainty the language or the form — be it oral or written, poetry or prose — in which Babrius might have encountered these texts, if at all. Such inquiries, while intriguing, fall outside the purview of my current discussion. My objective here is merely to propose that the parallels I have laid out substantiate the possibility that Babrius was aware of fabulistic narratives within Mesopotamian contexts, and that his second prologue alludes to the *poetic* nature of these early fables with the word μῦθος. The question of whether Babrius actually read these texts remains an entirely separate scholarly problem.

3 Babrius' first prologue

If the second prologue takes a historical approach to the genre of the fable, discussing its origin, the first prologue traces a link between the fictional world of fables and a long-gone mythological past where animals could speak. Fables — also those by Aesop! — and the act of narration are referred to with the noun μῦθος (1 *prol.* 16) or its cognate (μυθέομεν, 1 *prol.* 7).[28] This apparent inconsistency, where Aesop's fables are labeled μῦθοι instead of λόγοι as in the second prologue, does not indicate a lack of distinction between these two generic terms on the part

rules we know for Akkadian poetry. However, the surviving lines seem to follow a poetic structure and, most importantly, most of the lines seem to observe parallelism, an important Akkadian poetic feature. I thank Enrique Jiménez for pointing this out to me.

25 See e.g. West 2000, 95–96; Haubold 2013, 25–29.

26 See Currie 2021, 143–144, esp. n. 101.

27 Haubold 2013, 25–23 discusses the danger of a comparatist approach in the genre of fable. Cf. Spielhofer 2023, 112 n. 144. According to Holzberg 2019, 19 by mentioning the oriental fable, the author implies that he knew of such collections.

28 μυθέομεν in 1 *prol.* 7 could refer both to Babrius' individual act of narrating fables (and a conversation between Branchus and the I of the prologue) and to human fable-telling in general (including Babrius' fables).

of Babrius. On the contrary, I submit that Babrius employs the full potential of this generic terminology in two different contexts.

Let us take a closer look at the text of the first prologue where Babrius meaningfully opposes λόγοι and μῦθοι to highlight the fictional nature of his fables:

Γενεὴ δικαίων ἦν τὸ πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων
ὦ Βράγχε τέκνον, ἣν καλοῦσι χρυσείην,
μεθ' ἣν γενέσθαι φασὶν ἀργυρῆν ἄλλην·
τρίτη δ' ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἐσμεν ἡ σιδηρείη.
ἐπὶ τῆς δὲ χρυσῆς καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν ζῴων
φωνὴν ἔναρθρον εἶχε καὶ λόγους ᾔδει
οἵους περ ἡμεῖς μυθέομεν ἐς ἀλλήλους,
ἀγοραὶ δὲ τούτων ἦσαν ἐν μέσαις ὕλαις.
ἐλάλει δὲ πεύκη καὶ τὰ φύλλα τῆς δάφνης,
καὶ πρῶτος ἰχθὺς συνελάλει φίλῳ ναύτῃ·
στρουθοὶ δὲ συνετὰ πρὸς γεωργὸν ὡμίλουν·
ἐφύετ' ἐκ γῆς πάντα μηδὲν αἰτούσης,
θνητῶν δ' ὑπῆρχε καὶ θεῶν ἑταιρείη.
μαθὼν δ' ἄρ' οὕτω ταῦτ' ἔχοντα καὶ γνοίης
ἐκ τοῦ σοφοῦ γέροντος ἥμιν Αἰσώπου
μύθους φράσαντος τῆς ἐλευθέρης μούσης·
ὧν νῦν ἕκαστον ἀνθίσας ἐμῇ μνήμῃ
μελισταγές σοι †νοῦ τὸ† κηρίον θήσω,
πικρῶν ἰάμβων σκληρὰ κῶλα θηλύνας.[29]
(Babr. 1 *prol.*)

At first, there was a race of just men, Branchus my boy, which they call golden. After them, they say, came another generation, of silver; after these, we are the third generation, the one of iron. But in the golden age also all the other living creatures had articulated speech and knew such *logoi* as we ourselves now tell each other [in the form of μῦθοι]. Their assemblies were in the middle of the forests. Even the pine tree and the leaves of the laurel chatted. Also, at first, the fish chatted with the friendly sailor. The sparrows conversed in an intelligible way with the farmer. Everything grew from the earth, which was asking for nothing in return, and a companionship existed between gods and mortals. Having learnt that these things were so, may you also learn them from wise old Aesop, who told us fables (μῦθοι) with a free muse. Having adorned each one of these with flowers by means of my own memory, I shall set before you a honeycomb […] dripping with sweetness, having softened the hard parts of the bitter *iamboi*.

(Transl. V.B.)

After a brief list of the different ages of man, the prologue launches into a description of the golden age. Within this description, lines 5–7 are worthy of closer analy-

29 I follow Vaio's 2001 reconstruction of the text. Cf. Spielhofer 2023, 89–94.

sis because they will provide a springboard for a discussion of Babrius' μῦθοι on the basis of the opposition between μυθέομεν (7) and λόγους (6). *Prima facie*, Babrius here emphasizes that animals in this version of the golden age can speak with each other, just like we do.[30] Most scholars seem to render these lines in accordance with this understanding of the text. For example, Perry translates: "Now in the Golden age not only men but all the other living creatures had the power of speech and were familiar with such words as we ourselves now use in speaking to each other."[31] In my opinion, translations of this sort do not convey the importance of the two generic markers, λόγους and μυθέομεν,[32] and their fine semantic distinction.

To my knowledge, the only two scholars who have made an attempt at analysing these lines in depth are Williams and Vaio.[33] The only witness for line 7 of Babrius' first prologue is the fourth-century papyrus *Π₄* (P.Bouriant 1: οἵους περ ἡμεῖς μυθέομεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους) and some scholars have accordingly regarded it as spurious.[34] In order to defend the originality of line 7, Vaio observes that:

> Babrius distinguished between λόγοι ("words") at line 6 and μῦθοι ("fables") at line 16. (λόγους) μυθεῖν, used of actual human speech, becomes a play on words to make the following point: that animals of the Golden Age and in Aesop's fable (μῦθοι) knew such words (λόγοι) as we humans speak (μυθέομεν). The fabulous and the actual coincide in this matter of language.[35]

While spotting the juxtaposition of λόγους and μυθέομεν, Vaio does not uncover its full meaning.

Williams goes further in his interpretation, detecting in Babrius' prologue an allusion to Plato's *Politicus*.[36] In this dialogue, immediately after the Elean stranger finishes discussing the nature of the age of Cronus (268d7–272b3), he asks his interlocutor whether the age of Cronus or that of Zeus, during which they live, is

30 For other discussions of speaking animals in Babrius, see Allgaier 2020; 2022; Pertsinidis 2020.

31 Perry 1965, 3. Similar translations are offered, e.g. by Hawkins 2015, 307; Mann 2018, 260–261; Spielhofer 2023, 88.

32 See n. 43 below.

33 Williams 1981; Vaio 2001. Cf. Althoff 2023, 353–354.

34 I believe line 7 to be original: cf. Vaio 1969; 2001, 5–7; Spielhofer 2023, 91–92; *contra* Luzzatto 1989, 271; Holzberg 2019, 201.

35 Vaio 2001, 7.

36 Dillon 1992, 35 n. 17, observes *en passant* that there might be some similarities between the age of Cronus in the *Politicus* and Babrius' text. Gera 2003, 18–32, even reads Babrius' golden age against the description of Cronus' reign in *Politicus*. However, they do not signal possible textual interactions.

more blessed (272b3–4). Since Young Socrates is unable to give an answer, the stranger suggests that there are two possible scenarios for what the inhabitants of the age of Cronus might have done when provided with the ability to converse with animals (272b8–d6). On the one hand,

> Εἰ μὲν τοίνυν οἱ τρόφιμοι τοῦ Κρόνου, παρούσης αὐτοῖς οὕτω πολλῆς σχολῆς καὶ δυνάμεως πρὸς τὸ μὴ μόνον ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ καὶ θηρίοις διὰ λόγων δύνασθαι συγγίγνεσθαι, κατεχρῶντο τούτοις σύμπασιν ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν, μετά τε θηρίων καὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων ὁμιλοῦντες, καὶ πυνθανόμενοι παρὰ πάσης φύσεως εἴ τινά τις ἰδίαν δύναμιν ἔχουσα ἤσθετό τι διάφορον τῶν ἄλλων εἰς συναγυρμὸν φρονήσεως, εὔκριτον ὅτι τῶν νῦν οἱ τότε μυρίῳ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν διέφερον.
>
> (Pl. *Plt*. 272b8–c5)

> Well, then, if the foster children of Cronus, having all this leisure and the ability to converse not only with human beings but also with beasts, made full use of all these opportunities with a view to philosophy, talking with the animals and with one another and learning from every creature that, through possession of some peculiar power he may have had in any respect beyond his fellows perceptions tending towards an increase of wisdom, it would be easy to decide that the people of those old times were immeasurably happier than those of our epoch.
>
> (Transl. Fowler/Lamb)

On the other hand,

> εἰ δ' ἐμπιμπλάμενοι σίτων ἄδην καὶ ποτῶν **διελέγοντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ θηρία μύθους οἵοι**[37] **δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν περὶ αὐτῶν λέγονται**, καὶ τοῦτο, ὥς γε κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν ἀποφήνασθαι, καὶ μάλ' εὔκριτον. ὅμως δ' οὖν ταῦτα μὲν ἀφῶμεν, ἕως ἂν ἡμῖν μηνυτής τις ἱκανὸς φανῇ, ποτέρως οἱ τότε τὰς ἐπιθυμίας εἶχον περί τε ἐπιστημῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν λόγων χρείας.
>
> (Pl. *Plt*. 272c5–d4)

> Or if they merely ate and drank till they were full and gossiped with each other and the animals, telling such mythical stories as are even now told about them, in that case, too, it would, in my opinion, be very easy to reach a decision. However, let us pass those matters by, so long as there is no one capable of reporting whether the people in those days had desire for knowledge and the employment of speech.
>
> (Transl. Fowler/Lamb with alterations)

In the first scenario, the Elean concludes that the inhabitants of the age of Cronus would have been happier than those living in the current age of Zeus. In the second, he is a bit more cryptic, but one may safely assume that the lack of philoso-

37 I here follow the most recent *OCT* edition by Duke *et al*. 1995 which prints μύθους οἷοι. See Robinson 1995, 39.

phizing would not provide optimal living conditions.[38] The thematic connection between these two passages and Babrius' prologue is at any rate striking, as both authors reflect on the role of language in the golden age. However, the connection is not only thematic. According to Williams, Babrius clearly alludes to the last cited passage:

> the unusual construction of the verb διαλέγεσθαι with the accusative is matched by the transitive μυθεῖσθαι, resulting in a particularly neat example of *imitatio cum variatione*: διελέγοντο μύθους in Plato gives rise to λόγους μυθέομαι in Babrius. [...] In both passages the point is the same, that in the remote past, as pictured in Aesopic fables, animals were able themselves to tell the same fables which we now tell about them to our fellow humans.[39]

Williams is undoubtedly on to something, but he does not unpack all the implications of the parallel between Plato's *Politicus* and Babrius' *Mythiambi*. In particular, he does not expand on the juxtaposition of λόγοι and μῦθοι and he does not comment on the transformation of λόγοι into μῦθοι, from noun to verb and vice versa (διελέγοντο μύθους ~ λόγους μυθέομεν).

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38 The meaning of the sentence "it would be very easy to reach a decision" is ambiguous, and the speaker could be taking for granted that even under these conditions the inhabitants of the age of Cronus would be happier. However, the use of εἰ μέν and εἰ δέ in these passages posits a clear opposition between the two scenarios. Other scholars have already observed how Plato here seems to acknowledge that the golden age is not necessarily better than our time given its lack of philosophy: see e.g. Nightingale 1996, 84; Giorgini 2005, 206 n. 110; El Murr 2010, 291–294.

39 Williams 1981, 209. Cf. Althoff 2023, 353 n. 21, who (rightly) believes that a reference to Plato's *Politicus* could also be possible from a thematic standpoint, even without the debated line 7 of Babrius' first prologue. Similarly to Babrius (1 *prol.* 12), Plato claims that during the golden age everything grew spontaneously (καρποὺς δὲ ἀφθόνους εἶχον ἀπό τε δένδρων καὶ πολλῆς ὕλης ἄλλης, οὐχ ὑπὸ γεωργίας φυομένους, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτομάτης ἀναδιδούσης τῆς γῆς, 272a2–5). However, this parallel alone does not prove a link between the two texts as this feature is also present in Hesiod's golden age (Hes. *Op.* 116–118) and others, cf. e.g. Hom. *Od.* 9.108–109 and Ov. *Met.* 1.101–102. Within their respective descriptions of the golden age, the verb ὁμιλέω occurs in both Babrius (ὡμίλουν, 1 *prol.* 11) and Plato (ὁμιλοῦντες, *Plt.* 272c2). Another point of contact between the two texts might be found in the phrase πρὸς ἀλλήλους, if we accept this reading for line 7 of Babrius' first prologue. Vaio 2001, 6, suggests replacing πρός with ἐς so as to avoid the resolution of the seventh element which would create an anapaest, unique in this position. Nevertheless, as Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, ciii point out, no metrical rule exists without exception, and we do not possess the whole of Babrius. Although it is possible that line 7 as transmitted in Π_4 is a gloss of an interpolator borrowing the formulation from Plato (cf. Spielhofer 2023, 92 n. 28), the importance of Plato to the prologue of the *Mythiambi* increases the likelihood that our fabulist slightly forced the metre of his choliamb with the expression πρὸς ἀλλήλους to make the textual connection with the *Politicus* even stronger.

I argue that by recalling this passage, Babrius is bringing attention to the opposition between λόγους in line 6 and μυθέομεν in line 7. In Plato's *Politicus*, men and animals are said to be telling each other μῦθοι (**διελέγοντο** πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ θηρία **μύθους**)[40] such as the ones that we now tell about them (**οἷοι** δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν περὶ αὐτῶν **λέγονται**). In Babrius' prologue, however, the λόγοι that animals knew in the golden age (**λόγους** ᾔδει) are told about them by men of the present (**οἵους** περ ἡμεῖς **μυθέομεν** ἐς ἀλλήλους). Moreover, whereas in the *Politicus*, the speaker uses two verbs in the third person plural (διελέγοντο; λέγονται), thus distancing himself from the narrative act, Babrius chooses a first-person plural (μυθέομεν) when referring to the narration of fables in the present (1 *prol.* 7), thus showing his audience that he is one of those who narrate μῦθοι.[41] Furthermore, the change from διελέγοντο to μυθέομεν might signal a generic shift if we realize that Babrius, an author of fables, is drawing from a philosophical text; in fact, while the former verb was commonly used for philosophical, dialectical conversations,[42] the latter form is strongly linked with μῦθος,[43] the generic term for fable.[44]

40 Rowe 1995, 194, argues that "it is hard to see precisely which current stories (μῦθοι) ES is referring to; Aesop's fables […], which might look the obvious choice, typically involve talking animals, but not people." It is not true, however, that there are no Aesopic fables featuring humans. This mistaken conception is rooted in a late development of the genre (see Holzberg 2005, 248).

41 One may also observe that in the *Politicus* the inhabitants of the golden age are said to talk to each other and to the animals (πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ θηρία). In Babrius' time, men only talk to one another (ἐς ἀλλήλους).

42 See Rowe 1995, 194. Nevertheless, one should note that διελέγοντο in the quoted passage might signify a distinctly *unphilosophical* conversation!

43 Theon derives μῦθος from μυθέομαι (*Prog.* 73 Spengel). In the second prologue as well, Babrius describes his activity of narrating fables with a verb etymologically linked to the noun μῦθος: μυθιάζομαι (2 *prol.* 13).

44 The generic difference between fabulistic and philosophical conceptualizations of animals can be substantiated further if we detect in lines 5–6 of Babrius' prologue a playful allusion to the famous passage of Aristotle's *Politics*, where both men and animals are said to possess φωνή, but only the former have λόγος (1253a9–19). One might also compare a passage from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* where Socrates denies that animals have the ability of articulated speech (ἀρθροῦν […] τὴν φωνὴν, 1.4.12). The animals of Babrius' golden age and fables are characters of a fabulous world, not the object of philosophical study or natural science. Cf. Hawkins 2017. Interestingly, φωνή and λόγος are the gifts that Aesop receives from the Muses in the *Life of Aesop* (7.1–17 G, Ferrari 1997). Furthermore, the claim that animals have λόγος might hint at the way in which animals are sometimes referred to as τὰ ἄλογα (cf. e.g. Pl. *Prt.* 321c; Xen. *Hier.* 7.3; Epict. 1.6.12). See Heath 2005, 10: "The *logos* denied in [the] adjective *aloga* was originally speech, and only later spread its semantic wings to encompass 'irrationality'." Cf. Acosta-Hughes 2002, 176, on Callimachus' appropriation of the language of the zoological writers in the opening lines of *Iambi* 2. For a

There is another parallel between Babrius' *Mythiambi* and a text by Plato — his *Phaedo*, which, together with Babrius' reference to the *Politicus*, serves to focalize the opposition between λόγοι and μῦθοι in the three lines that open the description of the golden age. *Phaedo* 60b–d is part of Plato's narration of the last moments of Socrates' life. Cebes asks Socrates why he has dedicated himself to poetry while in prison (60d). Socrates explains that a dream urged him to (60e).[45] At first, he composed a hymn to Apollo, but then he decided to start putting Aesopic fables into verse:[46]

> ἐννοήσας ὅτι τὸν ποιητὴν δέοι, εἴπερ μέλλοι ποιητὴς εἶναι, ποιεῖν μύθους ἀλλ' οὐ λόγους, καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἦ μυθολογικός, διὰ ταῦτα δὴ **οὓς προχείρους εἶχον μύθους καὶ ἠπιστάμην**, τοὺς Αἰσώπου, τούτων ἐποίησα οἷς πρώτοις ἐνέτυχον.
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 61b3–7)

> Thinking that if one were to be a poet one should compose stories, not factual accounts, and I myself was not a creator of stories, then for this reason I worked up the first fables of Aesop I came across that I had available and that I knew.
>
> (Transl. Emlyn-Jones/Preddy with alterations).

This passage from Plato constitutes a kind of foundation myth for the transposition of Aesop's fables into poetry/song. Though others, like Hesiod, had included fables in their poems, it is the innovative Socrates who first attempts to put the Aesopic prose fables that he had at hand into verse (thus anticipating Alexandrian verse-adaptations of prose works, such as Aratus' *Phaenomena*, which is based on Eudoxius' astronomical work).[47] It would not be surprising, therefore, if Babrius

review of ancient philosophical positions on whether animals have speech and reason or not, see Sorabji 1993, 80–86.

45 See also Luchetti's chapter in this volume on this passage in the *Phaedo*.

46 On why the soon-to-die Socrates evokes Aesop (likewise condemned to death), see Kurke 2006, 13–19, 35–38; 2011, 251–264; Zafiropoulos 2011. Scholars have observed many similarities between these two characters — see Jedrkiewicz 1989, 111–127, 368–373; Schauer/Merkle 1992; Compton 2006, 154–165; Zafiropoulos, 2015. Not only is Aesop important for Plato as an author (cf. esp. Kurke 2011, 253; Capra 2019), but both Plato and his Socrates play a significant role in the history of fable: cf. Jedrkiewicz 1989, 368 n. 68.

47 Scholars have entertained the possibility that a prose book containing the *Life of Aesop* and some fables was already circulating in the 6th or 5th century BCE and that this book would have provided Demetrius of Phalerum with a model for creating a collection of Aesopic texts in the 4th century. Cf. Hausrath 1909, coll. 1711–1714; Crusius 1920, xvi–xviii; Zeitz 1936, 242–245. According to this hypothesis, Socrates might point to the book's existence with the phrase προχείρους εἶχον μύθους. Although recent scholarship seems to have rejected this *Volksbuch* model, some scholars still argue for an early textual fixation of the Aesopic material: see e.g. West 1984.

were here connecting his text with Socrates' words in a rather Alexandrian, witty and playful manner:[48]

> ἐπὶ τῆς δὲ χρυσῆς καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν ζῴων
> φωνὴν ἔναρθρον **εἶχε καὶ λόγους ᾔδει**
> **οἵους** περ ἡμεῖς μυθέομεν ἐς ἀλλήλους
> (Babr. 1 *prol.* 5–7)

In both, we find a phrase (see text in bold) which is opened by a form of the verb ἔχω (εἶχον, εἶχε) and closed by a verb of knowledge (ἠπιστάμην, ᾔδει). Between these two verbs, both in Plato and in Babrius, we find the conjunction καί.[49] In Babrius we find λόγους, where Plato has μύθους: two terms used to indicate fables.

Socrates' formal transformation of prose fables into poetry (maybe in iambic verse?)[50] is crucial for Babrius, insofar as the process of taking Aesopic material and versifying it characterizes his poetic activity in the *Mythiambi*. But it implicates another of Babrius' models as well, namely Callimachus. For the textual link between Babrius' first prologue and Plato's *Phaedo* is also important in considering the relationship between the *Mythiambi* and Callimachus' *Iambi* 2. Hawkins and Spielhofer already noticed that Babrius' first prologue is dominated by references to Callimachus.[51] For example, the name of Babrius' addressee Branchus recalls the title-character from Callimachus' *Branchus* (*fr*. 229 Pf.), who appears also in *Iambi* 4 — "a Callimachean calling card", as Hawkins calls it.[52] The latter poem, featuring a quarrel between the laurel and the olive tree, is also brought to mind by Babrius' mention of the chatty laurel in line 9. Let us now see why *Iambi 2* is particularly relevant to our present discussion:

48 It only makes sense for Babrius to start his prologue by alluding to Hesiod, often regarded in antiquity as the first fabulist (cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.19; Plut. *Conv*. *sept*. *sap*. 158b), through his evocation of the ages of men, and then to connect his work to Socrates, the first to have put Aesopic fables into poetry.

49 There might also be a connection between προχείρους and ἔναρθρον, insofar as both terms consist of a preposition working as a prefix (προ-, ἔν-) and a noun belonging to the semantic field of the body (-αρθρον, -χείρους). Plato's relative pronoun οὕς could, moreover, find its parallel in Babrius' οἵους.

50 Adrados 1999, 244, believes that Socrates set these fables to an iambic metre.

51 Hawkins 2014; 2015; Spielhofer 2023, 94–109.

52 Hawkins 2014, 101. The Callimachean Branchus was a mythical shepherd who founded the shrine of Apollo at Didyma. Supposedly, the *Branchus* was an occasional poem meant to memorialize the Ptolemaic refoundation of this shrine. In *Iambi* 4 (28–31), Branchus is depicted as a favorite of Apollo. See Acosta-Hughes 2003.

Ἦν κεῖνος οὐνιαυτός, ᾧ τό τε πτηνόν
καὶ τοὺν θαλάσσῃ καὶ τὸ τετράπουν αὔτως
ἐφθέγγεθ᾽ ὡς ὁ πηλὸς ὁ Προμήθειος
. . . . . .
τἀπὶ Κρόνου τε καὶ ἔτι τὰ πρὸ τη[
λ..ουσα και κως [.]υ σ[.]νημεναις.[5
δίκαιος ὁ [Ζε]ύς, οὐ δίκαι[α] δ᾽ αἰσυμνέ̣ων
τῶν ἑρπετῶν [μ]ὲν ἐξέκοψε τὸ φθέ̣[γμα,
γένος δὲ τ.υτ.[.].ρον — ὥσπερ οὐ κάρτ[ος
ἡμέων ἐχόντων χἠτέροις ἀπάρξασθαι –
...]ψ ἐς ἀνδρῶν· καὶ κ͵ιυ͵νὸς [μ]ὲ̣[ν] ͵Εὔ͵δημος, 10
ὄ͵ιν͵ο͵υ δὲ Φίλτων, ψιττακοῦ δ̣ε̣[
οἱ δὲ τραγῳδοὶ τῶν θάλασσαν ο̣ἰ̣[κεύντων
ἔχο[υ]σι φωνήν· οἱ δὲ πάντες [ἄνθρωποι
καὶ πουλύμυθοι καὶ λάλοι πε̣φ̣[ύκασιν
ἐκεῖθεν, ὠνδρόνικε· ταῦτα δ᾽ Α͵ιΐσω͵πος 15
ὁ Σαρδιηνὸς εἶπεν, ὅντιν᾽ οἱ Δελφοί
ἄδοντα μῦθον οὐ καλῶς ἐδέξαντο.
(Callim. *Ia.* 2)

It was in that time, when the winged | and that which dwells in the sea, and likewise the four-footed | used to give utterance as does the Promethean clay | ... | in the time of Cronus' rule, and still before [| and [saying] how [.]υ σ[.]νημεναις.[| just is Zeus, but not justly ruling, | he cut off the voice of those which crawl, | yet the race τ.υτ.[.].ρον — as though we had | not enough power to give the first fruits even to others — | ...]ψ [he turned] to [the race] of men. And Eudemus has | the voice of a dog, and Philton that of an ass, and of the parrot [| and the tragedians have that of those | who dwell in the sea. And all men | are both wordy and babbling | from that time, Andronicus. These things Aesop | from Sardis said, whom the Delphians | did not receive well as he sang his tale.

(Transl. Acosta-Hughes)

Although not much is left from this Callimachean poem, the Diegesis to *Iambi* 2 allows us to make better sense of these fragmentary lines: during a time when men and animals shared the ability to talk, the animals complained about the way in which Zeus ruled and the father of the gods, as punishment, took the ability to speak away from them. Consequently, the race of men became even more "wordy" and "babbling".[53]

Both Babrius' first prologue and Callimachus' *Iambi 2* discuss a period of time when animals and man could speak, and both indicate Aesop as a source of fa-

53 Convinced that Babrius reworked the Callimachean text, Hausrath 1949 used his prologue to reconstruct what is missing from *Iambi* 2. Cf. Corbato 1979 and Acosta-Hughes 2002, 176 n. 18.

bles.[54] Furthermore, there are also textual parallels between these two poems that are worth considering: for example, the adjective δίκαιος from *Iambi* 2.6 is picked up in 1 *prol.* 1, while the adjective λάλος (*Ia.* 2.14) is echoed in the verb λαλέω (1 *prol.* 9). Moreover, the use of ταῦτα in both poems (1 *prol.* 14; *Ia.* 2.15), with reference to the things that the addressee can learn from Aesop, and the two nouns Αἰσώπου (1 *prol.* 15) and Αἴσωπος (*Ia.* 2.15) suggest a further connection between the two passages.

According to Hawkins, when Babrius decides to versify Aesopic fables,

> it could be imagined that Babrius was looking more to Callimachus than the Platonic Socrates […]. But although Callimachus may well have taken a cue from Plato, he does not bray about his creativity on this point as openly as do Babrius and the Platonic Socrates. So even though no signs of a specific verbal allusion to Plato exist here, an important connection emerges between what Socrates did in the *Phaedo* and what Babrius claims for his own poetry in both of his prologues.[55]

Considering the link between Babrius' poetic programme and both Callimachus and Plato, it should (*pace* Hawkins) not come as a surprise to also find a textual connection with Plato's *Phaedo* in Babrius' prologue. This possibility gains even more traction if one considers that the Platonic passage in question was also relevant for Callimachus' *Iambi*, an important model for our fabulist. As Scodel and Acosta-Hughes argue, in Callimachus' *Iambi* 2.17 (ᾄδοντα μῦθον),[56] "in his act of 'singing *mythos*', i.e. rendering *mythos* as μουσική, Aesop reflects Socrates' music-making in the *Phaedo*."[57] Babrius thus presents himself as the heir of a tradition of versifying fables that counts among its ranks one of the most famous philosophers of Classical Greece and one of the major representatives of Hellenistic poetry.

The connection with the *Phaedo* alerts the reader once more to the programmatic juxtaposition of μῦθοι and λόγοι in Babrius' first prologue. In fact, Socrates claims in the *Phaedo* that the poet should deal with μῦθοι, "fictional narratives", rather than with λόγοι, "factual accounts" (61b).[58] Significantly, both of these

54 Cf. Hawkins 2015, 312. In Babrius, however, Aesop appears as a source of fables in general, whereas in Callimachus he is the source of a particular story.

55 Hawkins 2014, 110; 2015, 315.

56 For Hawkins 2015, 312, the Callimachean image of Aesop singing fables is used by Babrius to bookend the second prologue: μῦθος (2 *prol.* 1) […] ἀείδω (2 *prol.* 16).

57 Acosta-Hughes/Scodel 2004, 10.

58 The use of λόγοι and μῦθοι in this passage has been the subject of prolific discussion. Cf. e.g. Rowe 1993, 120–122; Jedrkiewicz 1989, 368–373; Morgan 2000, 192–197; Giuliano 2005, 221–223. The difference between λόγοι and μῦθοι appears also elsewhere in Plato, cf. e.g. *Grg.* 523a. Like Babrius, Plato uses both λόγος and μῦθος to describe Aesop's fables in the *Phaedo*: Cebes uses the term

words can also indicate "fables"; however, when they are juxtaposed, μῦθος has a connotation of fictitiousness.[59] In the context of Babrius' first prologue, this opposition drives a meaningful wedge between Babrius' fables, which in the first prologue are conceived as μῦθοι through the verb μυθέομεν, and the animals' λόγοι in the golden age.[60] Within the setting of the golden age, all animals are described as knowing λόγοι (λόγους ᾔδει, 1 *prol.* 6), which could have a wide range of meanings, from "words" or "speeches" to "narratives" (even "fables"!),[61] or, in a philosophical vein, "reasons", "philosophical discourses", or "factual accounts".[62] However, once these λόγοι, whether they are words, accounts or narratives, are taken out of their original setting and placed within Babrius' poetic discourse, they are transformed into μῦθοι or told in the form of μῦθοι (μυθέομεν, 1 *prol.* 7). In my view, given the different meanings of λόγοι and μῦθοι, this juxtaposition highlights the exact opposite of what Vaio argues: here, the fabulous and the actual do *not* coincide. When the λόγοι, the conversations which the inhabitants of the golden age share with each other, are extracted from their original setting, they are told in the form of μῦθοι, i.e. "fictional narratives", where animals can still speak and interact with men and gods even if the golden age is at that stage long

λόγος (60d1) and Socrates μῦθος (61b6). However, this does not reflect a lack of differentiation (see Dorter 1982, 6–7; Rowe 1993, 122). Plato seems to acknowledge a difference, at least a formal one if not also in content, between these two terms and their relationship with truth. For a different reading of the passage, see Zafiropoulos 2015, 106–107.

59 See van Dijk 1997, 85 (with further references), who observes that "in principle, μῦθος 'story', like the post-epic λόγος, is neutral as to the fictitiousness or veracity of the story which it designates. Later, when λόγος eclipses μῦθος, a differentiating tendency can be observed, in that μῦθος is reserved for 'fiction', λόγος 'truth'. When fables are termed both μῦθος and λόγος, μῦθος often has an obvious connotation of fictitiousness." He also points to Pl. *Phd.* 60c–61b to back up these observations. Cf. Zafiropoulos 2001, 2–3. For other instances of the distinction between μῦθος and λόγος in Greek imperial literature (esp. ancient novels), see Hunter 1983, 47–48, 114 n. 99. Cf. Vernant 1980, 186–207; Buxton 1999; Wians 2009; 2019.

60 Aesop's fables are referred to as μύθους at 1 *prol.* 16, and, consequently, so are those by Babrius because he claims to be using Aesopic material at 1 *prol.* 17. Also, Babrius is part of the first person plural ἡμεῖς which is the subject of μυθέομεν at 1 *prol.* 7.

61 One may even argue that Babrius is here proposing that in the golden age animals were telling each other stories which resemble the fables Babrius and Aesop offer to their public!

62 The fact that Babrius already uses the *terminus technicus* of rhetoric φωνὴν ἔναρθρον to describe animals' speech (cf. Spielhofer 2023, 96) would make it less of a surprise to read λόγος as another *terminus technicus* for philosophical discourse. Furthermore, in the *Politicus* λόγος is also used to indicate a philosophical conversation (*Plt.* 268d–e). It might even be possible to envision the inhabitants of Babrius' golden age conducting philosophical discussions.

gone.[63] In my view, Babrius, subject of the verb μυθέομεν,[64] and Aesop, whose μῦθοι are the source of inspiration for Babrius' poetic output, can only recreate these vocal interactions between animals by turning λόγοι into μῦθοι, fictionalizing the very ability of animals to talk which once was a reality. In this way, if Plato's Socrates highlights the difference between λόγοι and μῦθοι and describes his process of turning Aesopic prose fables into verse, the first prologue to the *Mythiambi* shows that, firstly, Babrius is aligning his literary goal with Socrates' attempt at versifying Aesopic fables,[65] and, secondly, that he is reflecting on what it means to turn λόγοι, "factual accounts" or "speeches" of the inhabitants of the golden age, into μῦθοι, "fictional narratives" in verse.

Furthermore, Babrius' allusion to Plato allows him to grant his fables a certain degree of seriousness and meaningfulness. Although Plato denounces μῦθοι which are plainly false without any ethical or philosophical relevance,[66] he is not opposed to all μῦθοι:[67] "both forms of discourse [λόγοι and μῦθοι] are necessary because, although each one is unmistakably different from the other, nonetheless each one offers a complementary access to truth."[68] It is within this framework that Babrius seems to have carefully chosen his allusions to the Platonic corpus by

63 The separation is emphasized by the juxtaposition of two verbs, εἶχε and ᾖδει, in the past tense in line 6 and the verb μυθέομεν in the present tense in line 7.

64 See n. 28 above.

65 Nothing survives of these verses, if they ever existed in the first place, which is impossible to determine. For acceptance of Socrates' having composed a hymn to Apollo and versified the fables of Aesop, see Guthrie 1969, 326 n. 1; West 1984, 109; Vander Waerdt 1994, 4–5. For a speculative attempt at identifying what fables Socrates versified, see McPherran 2012.

66 For a philosophical discussion of the importance of μῦθος and its meaning in Plato, see Brisson 1994; Murray 1999; Halliwell 2000; Morgan 2000, 132–184; Partenie 2009; Collobert *et al.* 2012.

67 μῦθος for Plato is a term that encompasses various types of narratives, including Aesopic fables. In fact, also in the *Politicus*, Plato might refer to μῦθος in a way that is far broader than just Aesopic fables. It is not always easy to distinguish in Greek if μῦθος should be understood as myth or as fable. Nevertheless, as Kurke 2011, 254, observed, Socrates' strict preference for referring to Aesopic tales as μῦθοι in the *Phaedo* is "suggestive, since it raises the possibility that platonic μῦθος, universally and unproblematically understood as 'myth' in the reading of Plato's dialogues may — at least on some occasion — denote Aesopic fables." Babrius himself does not seem to mark the genre of the fable in stark contrast with myth. This is clear in his choice to open his book of fables with a version of the Hesiodic myth (cf. Kurke 2011, 287 n. 68, who categorizes the Hesiodic myth of races as a fable), which leads Nøjgaard 1967, 192 to argue that Babrius invites us to look at his fable as a kind of myth, a fantastic tale. The idea that Babrius is intentionally thinning the generic boundaries between myth and fable, as they are both μῦθοι, is further supported by the presence of mythological characters in his fables, such as Herakles (Babr. 15; 20), Theseus (Babr. 15), Prokne and Philomela (Babr. 12), and Prometheus (Babr. 66).

68 Most 2012, 23.

selecting two dialogues where μῦθοι are considered an inextricable part of the Platonic philosophical dialectic. In this way, Babrius stresses that his μῦθοι are not mere trivial "fictional tales".

If we now take into consideration the context of the lines of the *Politicus* and the *Phaedo*, to which Babrius alludes in lines 6 and 7 of his first prologue, it will become clear that the content of his fables is meant to be serious, useful and with some philosophical relevance. In the *Phaedo*, when Socrates philosophizes about the concepts of pleasure and pain (60b–c), he claims that, "if Aesop had thought of it, he would have written a fable (μῦθον)" (εἰ ἐνενόησεν αὐτὰ Αἴσωπος, μῦθον ἂν συνθεῖναι, Pl. *Phd*. 60c1–2). As Jedrkiewicz observes, we can see in this extract how for Plato Aesopic fable-telling can thus be an alternative form of philosophizing, of aiming at the truth.[69] The importance of μῦθος is also stressed in the other Socratic passages recalled in Babrius' first prologue. Technically speaking, Plato's description of the golden age in the *Politicus* is not targeting μῦθοι as useless per se, but the use of μῦθοι for trivial purposes in the context of eating and drinking.[70] In fact, in the *Politicus* the value of μῦθος as a philosophical tool is undeniable. In order to prevent their philosophical argument (λόγος) from hitting a roadblock, the young Socrates and the Elean decide to make use of μῦθος, the narration of the golden age, as a viable alternative for conducting their philosophical discussion (268d). Thus, by tying his work to Plato's *Phaedo* and *Politicus* and by juxtaposing λόγος and μῦθος in lines 6–7, Babrius also emphasizes the potential of fables to convey a valuable message to his audience,[71] through a process of fictionalization which requires a transformation of λόγος, "argument", into μῦθος, "fiction".[72]

My contention that Babrius' juxtaposition of λόγος and μῦθος in the first prologue underscores the ability of his fables to carry a serious meaning is strength-

69 Jedrkiewicz 1989, 369. Cf. also Giuliano 2005, 222, 295, and Morgan 2000, 193.

70 What should we make of the fact that the passage from Plato's *Politicus* to which Babrius alludes envisions frivolous, trivial, and seemingly non-philosophical conversations? In my view, Babrius subtly challenges the Elean Stranger's assumption that the golden age would be no happier than present times if men "gossiped with each other and the animals, telling such mythical stories as are even now told about them." In fact, Babrius underscores that animals possess λόγος, making them ideal partners for meaningful dialogue. Additionally, Babrius could aim to demonstrate that even those stories which the Elean Stranger implicitly disparages as trivial might actually hold philosophical significance.

71 Babrius is not the first to observe the philosophical importance of fabulistic narratives, whose pedagogical and ethical relevance was well known by the Imperial era. On the ethics of Greek fable, see Zafiropolous 2001.

72 One could even push this interpretation further and argue that it is part of the genius of fable to see the rationality (λόγος) in animal speech and to convey that rationality in its μῦθοι.

ened by the denotations that these terms had acquired by the Imperial age. Theon defines the genre of fable as follows:

> Μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν. Εἰδέναι δὲ χρή, ὅτι μὴ περὶ παντὸς μύθου τὰ νῦν ἡ σκέψις ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷς μετὰ τὴν ἔκθεσιν ἐπιλέγομεν τὸν λόγον, ὅτου εἰκών ἐστιν· ἔσθ' ὅτε μέντοι τὸν λόγον εἰπόντες ἐπεισφέρομεν τοὺς μύθους.
>
> (Theon *Prog*. 72–73 Spengel)

> A fable is a fictitious story giving an image of truth,[73] but one should know that the present consideration is not about all fables but about those in which, after stating the fable, we add the meaning of which it is an image; sometimes, of course, we bring in the fables after having stated the meaning.
>
> (Transl. Kennedy)[74]

Here, λόγος is intimately connected with truth, whereas μῦθος is false in nature but resembling the truth. Moreover, this passage suggests that λόγος can also indicate "pro- or epimythium".[75] This is not surprising as the *fabula docet* is essentially the explanation of the meaning (λόγος) that the fable is trying to convey with its fictitious narrative (μῦθος). Accordingly, even though μῦθος, contrary to λόγος, is one step removed from ἀλήθεια, as it only resembles it, it can still partake of the λόγος. Such remarks might acquire further relevance in an author such as Babrius who does not always (if at all) attach a pro- or epimythium (λόγος) to his compositions.[76] Thus, by stressing that his μῦθοι are built on the basis of λόγοι, Babrius could also point out that his fables, μῦθοι, have meaning, λόγος, even in those cases when the *fabula docet* (λόγος) is apparently missing.

According to Hunter, Theon's definition of μῦθος is "one of the many ways in which traditions of education and criticism came to terms with the Platonic critique."[77] I believe that the Platonic references in Babrius and the juxtaposition of λόγος and μῦθος in lines 6 and 7 of his first prologue are to be read in similar

73 Here, ἀλήθειαν could be translated both as "truth" or "reality".

74 For more on this passage, see Patillon/Bolognesi 1997, xlix–lv; Morgan 1998, 221–223; Gangloff 2002, 26–32. Cf. also Plut. *Mor*. 348a: ὁ δὲ μῦθος εἶναι βούλεται λόγος ψευδὴς ἐοικὼς ἀληθινῷ ("a fable aims to be a false story resembling a true one").

75 The Greek text simply states "we add meaning" (ἐπιλέγομεν τὸν λόγον). According to Patillon/Bolognesi 1997, 31 n. 168, the use of ἐπιλέγειν indicates that this refers to what Theon subsequently terms ἐπιλόγος (*Prog*. 75.2 Spengel), i.e. "the moral". Cf. van Dijk 1997, 85; Hunter 2014, 238; Strong 2021, 163.

76 See Becker 2006; Spielhofer 2023, 21–22.

77 Hunter 2014, 237. This is not an unprecedented preoccupation in Greek Imperial literature: see e.g. Philostr. *V A* 5.14.2–3; Dio Chrys. *Or*. 1.49.

terms.[78] Plato radicalized the difference between μῦθος and λόγος, which was characteristic of early Greek philosophy, by reappropriating myth from the poetic realm and being the first to introduce a negative connotation for some μῦθοι.[79] By putting his work in relation to, and perhaps even competition with, two Platonic passages that acknowledge the pedagogical importance and philosophical value of μῦθος,[80] Babrius justifies the use of μῦθοι and appropriates them for his literary and pedagogical endeavour. Aesopic fables, in fact, had a crucial role in the ancient education system, especially in the curriculum of rhetorical exercises during the Imperial period.[81] In line with the intrinsically pedagogical nature of Aesop's fables, Babrius seems to envision an educational value also for his own fables, as he emphasizes the process of learning, which should result from Aesopic fables, and acquiring knowledge with the verbs μαθών and γνοίης (1 *prol.* 14) in the first prologue. In this way, Babrius presents himself as the educator of Branchus, who is the son of a king (ὦ παῖ βασιλέως Ἀλεξάνδρου, 2 *prol.* 1) and consequently, a future king.[82] While we know that poets like Callimachus or Theocritus had concrete ties to the Ptolemies, we know nothing at all about Babrius' links to any real king or prince. Nevertheless, regardless of whether Babrius was a real court poet or just pretending to be one, his self-presentation as such would not be unfitting in the context of fables. Indeed, he could be playing with the traditional image of Aesop as an adviser of kings.[83]

78 For the popularity of Plato during the Imperial era, see e.g. De Lacy 1974; Trapp 1990; Fowler 2018.

79 See e.g. Morgan 2000, 14–17, with further bibliography.

80 Betegh 2021, 78 argues that the way in which the Elean stranger introduces his myth (*Plt.* 268d–e) shows that he agrees with Plato's ideas in the *Laws*, where, through the character of the Athenian, he explains at great length that mythical narratives, even if technically lies, are essential in instilling the correct system of values and a shared *Weltanschauung* in young members of the community (*Leg.* 664a).

81 Cf. e.g. Becker 2006, esp. 169–171; Strong 2021, 131–172. The *tabulae ceratae Assendelftianae* place the work of Babrius in a pedagogical context. On these, see Hesseling 1892/1893.

82 Like Fusci 1901, 34 n. 2, I believe the son of King Alexander and Branchus to be the same person. The best approach to the problems surrounding the identity of the addressee in the prologues is to follow Hawkins 2014, 88 n. 3, who suggests that King Alexander and Branchus could be two fictional characters. Cf. Spielhofer 2021. For a different view, see Perry 1965, lvi–lvii. For a recent attempt at reconstructing the identity of the addressee, see Morgan 2007, 326–330.

83 See Adrados 1999, 652–654. In light of these considerations, it is even more striking that Babrius, a royal tutor, alludes to the *Politicus*, a dialogue which praises monarchy as a form of government, aims to discuss the qualities and nature of a good statesman, and also reflects on the nature of pedagogy.

4 Conclusion

As I have shown, the investigation of Babrius' narrative of the golden age where animals, gods and men could talk to each other plays a pivotal role in uncovering Babrius' conceptualization of the genre of the fable as μῦθος. Babrius' decision to conceive his own fables as μῦθος, as reflected in μυθίαμβος (2 *prol.* 9), carries with it a precise message: even as his fables are fictional and in verse, they retain their ability to convey a useful meaning (λόγος), maybe even a philosophically relevant one.[84] He casts λόγος into a mythical past and presents μῦθοι as a prerogative of the present. Throughout this discussion, it should have become clear that Babrius is not a simple writer of fables, but a skillful poet who interacts meaningfully and wittily with foundational ancient Greek authors such as Callimachus and Plato. If Plato reclaimed the use of myth from Greek literature for his philosophical purposes,[85] Babrius stages a process of reappropriating μῦθοι in the form of a "mythification of the *Logos*". This expression is borrowed from Most's article *From λόγος to μῦθος*.[86] Interestingly, Most highlights that, with some exceptions, the European philosophers following the Enlightenment had a new appreciation for the concept of myth (μῦθος) and its relations to reason (λόγος), in contrast to their predecessors. Although I do not want to evaluate Babrius' poetic programme by anachronistic standards, we may conclude that he too develops "a concept of *Mythos* which is full of the elements and claims of *Logos* and has the dignity of a Quasi-*Logos*."[87]

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84 *Contra* Nøjgaard 1967, 192. He argues that Babrian fables are not allegorical and no longer "moral" in the sense of didactic.

85 For an example, see e.g. Männlein-Robert 2014.

86 Most 1999, 42. *Contra* Nestle 1940.

87 Most 1999, 42.

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Damian Pierzak

The Use of Animal Fable in Ancient Oratory: Reality or Fiction?

Abstract: Aristotle's division of fictitious examples into comparisons and Aesopic fables seems logical in theory, but upon closer examination it appears to diverge from oratorical practice. Scholars have long been puzzled by Aristotle's extensive treatment of animal fables, compared to his treatment of historical *exempla* and similes, especially given the scarcity of such fables in surviving speeches. The use of fables as a means of persuasion is predominantly found in historiography and biographical works. As argued in this paper, none of these sources offers sufficient proof to validate the claim that animal fables were employed in actual oratory before the Imperial period. Instead, these instances reflect a literary trend that was probably inspired by rhetorical theory.

1 Introduction

In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, there is a hint that litigants in the Athenian court used to poke fun at each other by sharing "something funny from Aesop" (566).[1] In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle further confirms this by categorizing animal fables as a subset of rhetorical induction. He specifically mentions two kinds of examples that a speaker makes up himself (τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν): comparison (παραβολή) and fables (λόγοι). In addition, at *Rh*. 1393b8–1394a2, Aristotle provides two illustrations of the latter, namely Stesichorus' fable of "The Horse, the Stag, and the Man" and the Aesopic fable about "The Fox and the Hedgehog" [= Aesop. 427 P.].[2] Over four decades ago, Bennett J. Price noted the remarkable fact that Aristotle's "illustration of the fables takes more than twice as many lines as those devoted to historical

1 Hsch. α 2159, for example, infers from Ar. *Vesp*. 566 (Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιον) that καὶ ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις κοινοῖς ἔστιν ὅτε τοῖς Αἰσωπείοις ἐχρῶντο μύθοις ("in the Athenian courts of law the speakers sometimes made use of fables"). Some modern scholars, such as Nøjgaard 1964, 461, appear to take Aristophanes' statement at face value. See also Biles/Olson 2015, 263, and Konstantakos 2021, 246, for general discussion of that passage. Strong 2021, 69 n. 35 provides references to recent scholarship on Aesop and fables in Aristophanes.

2 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 287–291; Kurke 2011, 255; Westwood 2020, 38–39. The former fable, later elaborated for instance by Horace (*Epist*. 1.10.34–41), is also known as "The Horse and the Hunter" (Aesop. 269 (a) P. [= 238 Hsr.; 329 Ch.]).

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examples and *parabolai* combined", despite the scarcity of fables in the extant speeches of the Attic orators.[3] Similarly, the Aesopic fable is mentioned in Latin handbooks of rhetoric, although such a device is notably absent from Roman Republican oratory. The discrepancy is even more striking since rhetorical theory mostly drew from the actual speeches that were delivered, and later published, over a specific period of time.[4] Consequently, this paper aims to re-examine the evidence for the use of animal fables in Graeco-Roman oratory. It also explores why the rhetoricians spent so much time discussing a device that seems in fact to have been avoided by the orators themselves. While the scarcity of sources makes it impossible to provide a definitive answer, a thorough analysis of relevant texts can offer new insights into the relationship between rhetorical theory and practice in Antiquity.

2 Aristotle's puzzling testimony and some modern solutions

Insights derived from ancient handbooks of rhetoric regarding Aesopic fables are often interpreted as indications of a genuine rhetorical tactic that was practised in Classical times. With regard to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and a few later treatises, Stanley F. Bonner[5] makes the following observation: "Even in the oratory of real life, the Fable was not without its uses, as a source of wise moralizing, or more often, a means of amusing an audience." However, Bonner did not provide any corroborative evidence from sources beyond theoretical writings to substantiate his assertion. One must exercise extreme caution when drawing such conclusions, especially given that historical examples held considerably more weight for both the Greeks and the Romans.[6] Indeed, this is what Aristotle himself implies:

3 Price 1975, 43, 45. Cf. Kurke 2011, 257, and more recently Biles/Olson 2015, 263: "Arist. *Rh.* 1393ª28–31, 1394ª2–5 recommends using fable in oratory, but no examples of the phenomenon survive." It is not until Late Antiquity that fables, apart from playing a significant role in (especially Greek) education, occasionally appeared in actual oratory (Julian. *Or*. 7.3.207a–d; Himer. *Or*. 66; Them. *Or*. 22.278c). See van Dijk 1997, 88–89, 91 for an overview.

4 Cf. Pierzak 2021, 77 with n. 1. To put the absence of fables from ancient oratory into perspective, what survives from Attic and Roman Republican oratory comprises 30 volumes in the Loeb Classical Library series (15 for Attic oratory and 15 for Roman Republican orators).

5 Bonner 1977, 255.

6 Cf. Jedrkiewicz 1989, 403: "Ma se occorre valutare una scelta specifica in un caso reale e di rilevanza collettiva, il ricorso all'esempio fittizio potrà con ragione apparire meno utile del

> ῥᾴω μὲν οὖν πορίσασθαι τὰ διὰ τῶν λόγων, χρησιμώτερα δὲ πρὸς τὸ βουλεύσασθαι τὰ διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων· ὅμοια γὰρ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τὰ μέλλοντα τοῖς γεγονόσιν.
>
> (*Rh*. 1394a6–9)

> It is easier, then, to supply oneself with examples from fables [τὰ διὰ τῶν λόγων], but for the purpose of deliberation, those that involve factual matters [τὰ διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων] are more useful, since for the most part the things that will happen in the future are similar to those that have happened in the past.
>
> (Transl. Bartlett)

The view that future courses of action can be determined in the light of past events reappears in other sections of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*,[7] where it specifically pertains to historical *exempla*.[8] In contrast to fables, extant speeches provide substantial evidence for the usefulness of historical *exempla* in deliberative oratory.[9] The question thus arises: why did ancient rhetoricians persist in incorporating these made-up examples within their treatises? Various explanations have been offered for Aristotle's preoccupation with fables.

Morten Nøjgaard[10] has proposed a theory suggesting that the relevant section of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* does not reflect the practice of his own day, but was instead inspired by the language of a previous generation. This relies on the dubious tes-

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richiamo all'esempio storico, dell'invocazione del precedente o antefatto reale nel quale erano già presentate le eventualità e le incognite da affrontare nella deliberazione presente" ("But if it is necessary to evaluate a specific choice in a real case of collective relevance, resorting to a fictitious example may rightly appear less useful than referring to a historical example, invoking a real precedent or an action that took place in the past in which the circumstances and uncertainties to be addressed in the current deliberation were already presented").

7 See Arist. *Rh*. 1368a, 1418a, and cf. 1357b (with Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.8); Lys. 25.23.

8 After recounting the story that Aesop had told the Samians, Aristotle describes (*Rh*. 1394a2–4) fables in almost exactly the same words he had used in reference to examples in general, namely that they are δημηγορικοί ("characteristic of the public assembly", i.e. the deliberative kind of oratory). Cf. Arist. *Rh*. 1368a29–31 with Rapp 2002, 430; *Rhet. Her*. 3.9; Price 1975, 170, 173 and *passim*; Nouhaud 1982, 24; Jedrkiewicz 1989, 399–400; Gazich 1990, 93; Lausberg 1990, 55 (§ 61.2); Demoen 1997, 131 n. 18; Kurke 2011, 256–257; and Strong 2021, 69. What distinguishes them favourably from *exempla*, he goes on to say, is that εἰσὶ δ' οἱ λόγοι δημηγορικοί, καὶ ἔχουσιν ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο, ὅτι πράγματα μὲν εὑρεῖν ὅμοια γεγενημένα χαλεπόν, λόγους δὲ ῥᾷον ("while it is difficult to discover past events similar to the matters at hand, it is easier to find fables", Arist. *Rh*. 1394a2–4 as transl. by Bartlett). On this subject, cf. for instance *Rhet. Her*. 1.6.10; Cic. *De or*. 2.264; Quint. *Inst*. 6.3.44; Price 1975, 45; Adamik 1982, 58; Jedrkiewicz 1989, 400; van Dijk 1997, 41; Rapp 2002, 734 *ad loc*.

9 See e.g. Andoc. 3.3–12, 28–32, 37–39; Dem. 3.23–29, 9.22–25; Cic. *Leg. agr*. 1.20, 2.95, *Leg. Man*. 14, 55, *Phil*. 5.25, 6.4–6, and cf. for other numerous examples Jost 1936, Nouhaud 1982, Bücher 2006, and more recently Westwood 2020, 39, 50, and *passim*, Pierzak 2021, *passim*.

10 See Nøjgaard 1964, 465.

timony of Aristophanes (cf. n. 1) and certain anecdotes about Demosthenes and Demades (discussed in the next section) that are found in later sources. Nøjgaard presumes that, because contemporary examples of this phenomenon were unavailable, Aristotle's illustrations are exclusively drawn from a distant past, but this would not explain why Aristotle failed to supply an example from the period before Demosthenes. And if we look back to a previous generation, to the time before Antiphon and Andocides, the theory becomes unverifiable, owing to the complete absence of evidence.

Another perspective, not necessarily contradictory to the previous one, was offered by Stefano Jedrkiewicz.[11] He addresses the discrepancy between Aristotle's precepts and actual oratorical practice in the following way: an orator could employ Aesopic fables when they were deemed suitable for a rhetorical goal, but only during oral performances. When a speech — particularly in the legal and political contexts — was prepared for publication, however, these fables were probably omitted, as they may have seemed inappropriate (cf. the final section). This view poses some challenges and does not easily align with our understanding of the relationship between oral delivery and the written record of an oration. Although a speech may become detached from its original purpose during the process of publication, the written version generally remains faithful to its initial form.[12]

More recently, Ioannis Konstantakos[13] has shown how the mock trial of the two dogs in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (826–1008) may, in fact, reflect the manner of speech of the Athenian demagogue Cleon and the general Laches. On this basis, Konstantakos argues that the narration of Aesopic fables was indeed a known practice in Athenian oratory of the 5th century. In his essay, Konstantakos acknowledges in his concluding remarks that "the tracking of elements from Athenian political oratory has been restricted to a single Aristophanic scene" and that there "is material for a further, more extensive study."[14] While this is a promising area of investigation, the evidence drawn from Old Comedy, though compelling, must remain inconclusive until further research has been conducted.

11 See Jedrkiewicz 1989, 402–403.

12 See Stroh 1975, 56, on the pedagogical function of the written version of the speech, and cf. Fuhrmann 1990, 55–56, 61 on the concept of "fictive orality." See also recently Manuwald 2018, xxxviii, on the delivery and publication of Cicero's *Agrarian Speeches*. Extreme cases include Cicero's *Pro Cornelio* of 67 BCE, where (as reported by Cornelius Nepos, *fr*. 38 Marshall [= T10 Crawford]) the published version closely mirrored the original, and his *Pro Milone*, which significantly deviated from the speech Cicero actually delivered in 52 (Cass. Dio 40.54.3).

13 See Konstantakos 2021, 246–247.

14 Konstantakos 2021, 251.

3 Attic orators and the animal fable

Although unattested in the extant speeches of classical Athens,[15] the use of animal fables is ascribed to certain Attic orators in later sources. When faced with an inattentive audience or, according to an alternative account, one that obstructed his speech, Demosthenes is purported to have recounted the fable about "The Shadow of the Ass".[16] The rhetorical setting varies in the different sources: Demosthenes' speech is described as being delivered either in the assembly or in court, with the exact circumstances left unspecified. In each version, in order to reclaim the attention of the Athenians, the orator promises to share a tale. Once he has compelled them to listen, however, Demosthenes commences his narration of the fable only to abruptly halt the narrative at a pivotal moment. When the Athenians implore him to conclude, he reproaches them for preferring a story about the shadow of an ass over a speech addressing serious matters. A remarkably similar anecdote is recounted in relation to Demades, a contemporary of Demosthenes. He, too, resorts to an Aesopic fable (involving Demeter, the swallow, and the eel) when addressing the Athenian *dēmos* and, like Demosthenes, declines to disclose the conclusion of the story. When the audience asks about Demeter's fate, he retorts: "κεχόλωται ὑμῖν, οἵ τινες τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράγματα ἐάσαντες Αἰσωπείων μύθων ἀκούειν ἀνέχεσθε" ("she is angry with you, who having given up the affairs of the city bear listening to an Aesopic fable"; transl. after Zafiropoulos, adapted).[17] The shared manner in which both orators captivate the interest of their audiences aligns with the precepts that are found in Latin handbooks of rhetoric, which suggest that fables may be employed to engage an inattentive audience.[18] There are, however, at least two reasons to question the reliability of

15 Unless Dem. 18.243 counts as a fable ("The Doctor and the Sick Person", Aesop. 114 P. [= 116 Hsr.; 135 Ch.]; cf. Jedrkiewicz 1989, 401), and not simply a "hypothetical comparison" (thus, van Dijk 1997, 651). See also Dornseiff 1924/1925, 208, who provides two examples from historiography and Adrados 1999, 379–380. I do not consider Lycurg. 1.95–97 to be a fable (pace Westwood 2020, 50 n. 203: an example of a "more serious law-court fable").

16 See [Plut.] *X orat.* 848ab [= Aesop. 460 P.]; cf. *Suda* υ 357 Adler; van Dijk 1993, 179 n. 51. For the anecdote about Demosthenes, I follow the useful overview in van Dijk 1997, 298–299. Cf. more recently Westwood 2020, 50–51. On the fable about "The Shadow of the Ass", cf. Camps-Gaset (in this volume).

17 Demad. *fr.* 22 De Falco [= Aesop. 63 P./Hsr.; 96 Ch.]). The ancient sources listed by van Dijk 2015, 258 n. 208, concern "Zeus, Prometheus, Athena, Momus" (Aesop. 100 P. [= 102 Hsr.; 125 Ch.]) and not "Demades the Orator".

18 Cf. Karadagli 1981, 49–50; van Dijk 1993, 183; 1997, 298, 302; Strong 2021, 70, and on the rhetorical precept in question, see Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.25 and esp. *Rhet. Her.* 1.6.10 (*Si defessi erint audiendo,*

these accounts. (1) Superficially, these anecdotes might appear to confirm that fables were employed in Greek oratory of the 4th century BCE but, as Jedrkiewicz argues, they also highlight the orators' general aversion to fabulous narratives.[19] In my view, both orators demonstrate the utility of fables not so much as a persuasive tool, but rather as a means of *captatio benevolentiae*. (2) The rhetorical handbooks recommending this form of argumentation significantly predate[20] all the sources in which these episodes are reported. It thus follows that these stories are likely to have been later fabrications,[21] possibly inspired or "justified" by the guidelines found in the manuals of rhetoric. At any rate, neither of the fables mentioned above are employed to present an argument based on analogy between the narrative and the matter under dispute, as Aristotle's model would suggest.

This leaves us with the fable of "The Wolves and the Sheep" (Aesop. 153 P. [= 158 Hsr.; 218 Ch.]), which Aristobulus attributes to Demosthenes.[22] Unlike the other two accounts, this narrative not only meets Aristotle's criterion, but can also lay claim to some historicity. Following the destruction of Thebes in 335/334 BCE,

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ab aliqua re, quae risum mouere possit [sc. *exordiemur*], *ab apologo, fabula* ["If the hearers have been fatigued by listening, we shall open with something that may provoke laughter — a fable"; transl. Caplan]). For a few examples of fables "composed for entertainment" (but from outside rhetorical theory and practice), see Adamik 1982, 59–60. This is, for instance, how Menenius Agrippa introduced the story of the members and the belly (for Livy's version cf. the final section below), as reported by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 6.85 fin.): βούλομαί τινα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτον εἰπεῖν λόγον, ὦ δημόται· καί μου πρὸς θεῶν μεθ' ἡσυχίας καὶ προσοχῆς ἀκούσατε ("I desire to speak to that point also, plebeians, and I beg of you in the name of the gods to hear me with silence and attention"; transl. Cary).

19 Jedrkiewicz 1989, 401–402. For a different view, cf. Zafiropoulos 2001, 18: "This fable [i.e. Demades' — D. P.] was, we suppose, employed by the orators as an auxiliary means of persuading their audience".

20 However, in his commentary on *Rhet. Her*. 1.6.10, Calboli 2020, 498, conjectures that the idea derives from one of the following texts: Aristotle's lost treatise on comedy (second book of his *Poetics*), Theophrastus' Περὶ γελοίου, or the Περὶ χάριτος by Demetrius of Phalerum.

21 Cf. Jost 1936, 20 n. 1: "denn das beweisen, wenngleich als Ganzes erst später erfunden, dennoch die Anekdoten: sowohl Demades wie Demosthenes hätten das Volk gestraft dafür, daß es lieber Fabeln anhören wollte als Ratschläge für wichtige Tagesfragen" ("For the anecdotes, even if invented later as a whole, prove that both Demades and Demosthenes would have chastized the people for preferring to listen to fables rather than advice on important current issues"). Jedrkiewicz 1989, 402, considers the story about Demades to be a later variant of the one about Demosthenes ("la variante di quest'episodio"; cf. van Dijk 1997, 303); on the other hand, the anecdote about Demosthenes may have originated from a proverb to which the orator alludes elsewhere (5.24); see van Dijk 1997, 299–300 (cf. Ar. *Vesp*. 190; Karadagli 1981, 51).

22 Dem. *fr*. 13 Baiter–Sauppe (*FGrH* 139 F 3 *ap*. Plut. *Vit*. *Dem*. 23.5–6).

when Alexander demanded the surrender of eight prominent statesmen and generals, including Demosthenes, the orator is reported[23] to have likened "himself and his fellow-orators to dogs fighting in defence of the people" and referred to Alexander as "the Macedonian arch-wolf".[24] As the Athenians were not immediately convinced (βουλευομένων δὲ τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ διαπορούντων), Demosthenes' analogy must have given them food for thought. As Gert-Jan van Dijk rightly observes, the authenticity of this account is supported by the following facts: (1) other sources confirm that Demosthenes delivered a speech on this particular occasion;[25] and (2) pastoral imagery was a commonplace in Classical Greek in general and in the *corpus Demosthenicum* in particular.[26] Because Plutarch relies on Aristobulus, a historian who lived around the same time as Demosthenes, his version may be considered reliable, especially when compared to the two episodes discussed above. However, what may cast doubt on its historicity is the existence of different variants of the story in Antiquity. For instance, in one variant preserved by Isidore of Seville (*Etym*. 1.40), Alexander is replaced by his father Philip, and the shepherds constitute an additional group of characters. Naturally, between the 4th century BCE and Late Antiquity such a story, whether genuine or not, would have undergone significant changes.

4 Possible allusions to Aesopic fable in Roman Republican oratory

With no trace of fables in what survives of Post-Classical Greek rhetoric, our focus will now shift to Roman Republican oratory — particularly as this period appears to have been neglected by fable scholars. At one point in his third *Philippic*, Cicero interrupts his flow of thought with an emphatic exclamation that may seem oddly reminiscent of how Demosthenes sought to dissuade his fellow countrymen from accepting Alexander's demands. Just before the conclusion, when reporting Mark

23 Cf. Bosworth 1988, 196–197; Corbel-Morana 2012, 133–134. Karadagli 1981, 28–29, erroneously dates the event to 336 BCE, whereas Jedrkiewicz 1989, 401, makes Philip of Macedon, rather than Alexander, the target of this comparison. Both scholars seem to have taken the historicity of this episode for granted.

24 Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 23.5: ὅτε καὶ τὸν περὶ τῶν προβάτων λόγον ὁ Δημοσθένης, ἃ τοῖς λύκοις τοὺς κύνας ἐξέδωκε, διηγησάμενος, αὐτὸν μὲν εἴκασε καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ κυσὶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου μαχομένοις, Ἀλέξανδρον δὲ τὸν Μακεδόνα μονόλυκον προσηγόρευσεν (transl. Perrin).

25 van Dijk 1997, 293 n. 46, lists Diod. Sic. 17.15.3 and *Suda* α 1458 Adler.

26 See van Dijk 1997, 293, and van Dijk in Adrados 2003, 213. Cf. Konstantakos 2021, 242.

Antony's announcements, Cicero remarks that Antony will maintain an army near Rome until 1 May 43 BCE, with the intention of defending the city. In a tone steeped in sarcasm, Cicero suggests that Antony, in fact, poses a threat to the city and its inhabitants: *o praeclarum custodem ouium, ut aiunt, lupum!* ("What an excellent guardian of sheep, say they, is a wolf!", Cic. *Phil.* 3.27; transl. Ker). What immediately comes to mind is not a fable, but a proverb that is frequently found in Latin literature,[27] as is hardly unusual given Cicero's fondness for proverbial expressions. Incidentally, the two notions (i.e. fable and proverb) were closely connected in Antiquity, and Quintilian goes so far as to state that [sc. *paroimia*] *est uelut fabella breuior et per allegorian accipitur* ("proverb is a sort of abbreviated fable understood allegorically", *Inst.* 5.11.21; transl. Russell).[28] Another commonly held view is that a proverb derives from a fable or, conversely, a fable is made up "to explain an already existing proverb."[29] What seems to matter most from a rhetorical perspective, however, is the way in which the comparison was inserted into its context.[30] Assuming that the members of Cicero's audience knew the fable of which this proverb was a condensed version,[31] they could mentally fill in the entire narrative. Of course, even if Demosthenes indeed delivered a speech Ὑπὲρ τῶν ῥετόρων, and if Cicero, whose dependence on Attic oratory is universally recognized,[32] was acquainted with this speech, a direct influence is not very likely. The sheep, which are substituted for the Athenians and the Roman people, and the wolf, representing Alexander/Philip and Antony, respectively, fulfil a similar function in the arguments of both orators, but the dogs to be handed over to the arch-wolf, which in Demosthenes accounted for this narrative in the first place, are missing in Cicero. Cicero did not expect his audience to deduce anything on the basis of what Aristotle would call a "universal proposition."[33] His aim was simply to make clear that Antony is anything but a suitable guardian of the city. In

27 See e.g. Otto 1890/1962, 198 s.v. *lupus* 5 n. 984; Manuwald 2007, 423. This is emphasized in more recent translations, e.g. Ramsey/Manuwald 2009, 205: "Ah, a fine guardian, the proverbial wolf to guard the sheep!"; revised transl. after Shackleton Bailey.

28 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 46; Strong 2021, 222.

29 van Dijk 1997, 226. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the beast fable and the animal proverb, see e.g. Adrados 1999, 205–209. Cf. above, n. 21, and the contrbutions by Currie and Mordeglia in this volume.

30 Cf. Demoen 1997, 144–146, on *exemplum*.

31 The most likely candidate would be "The Wolf and the Shepherd" (Aesop. 234 P. [= 165 Hsr.; 230 Ch.]; Adrados 2003 erroneously lists Cic. *Phil.* 11.17, instead of 3.27, as an allusion to this fable), but cf. also "The Shepherd and the Young Wolves" (Aesop. 209 P. [= 225 Hsr.; 314 Ch.]), and "The Shepherd and the Wolf" (Aesop. 267 P. [= 276 Hsr.; 315 Ch.]).

32 See, in general, Weische 1972 and, more recently, Tempest 2019.

33 Or an "implied whole"; see Pierzak 2021, 38–39, 44–46.

the end, whether or not we treat this passage as referring to an animal fable depends on how much we are willing to read into Cicero's text.

Another potential allusion to a fable in Roman Republican oratory can be found in an unplaced fragment of M. Caelius Rufus.[34] At some time between 54 BCE and the outbreak of the Civil War, D. Laelius (*tr. pl.* 54) got into a quarrel with his colleague "as they both hurried off" (Quint. *Inst*. 6.3.39) to Sicily, where they were to serve as quaestors.[35] According to Quintilian, Caelius painted a delightful picture of this incident, concluding with the following words:

> hic subsecutus quo modo transierit, utrum rati an piscatorio nauigio, nemo sciebat: Siculi quidem, ut sunt lasciui et dicaces, aiebant in delphino sedisse et sic tamquam Ariona transuectum.
>
> (Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.41 [= ^{2}*ORF*, p. 489])

> He [i.e. Laelius] followed; but how he crossed over, by raft or by fishing boat, nobody knew. The Sicilians, though, as they have a naughty sense of humour and a ready tongue, said [*aiebant*] he rode on a dolphin and so made the crossing like Arion.
>
> (Transl. Manuwald)

The tale of Arion was widely known,[36] and despite him being a real historical figure, Caelius' argument appears more akin to a mythological *exemplum* than a fable. Nevertheless, beyond the fact that it is a fictional story featuring an animal character, there are reasons to categorize it as a fable. The theme of the dolphin saving Arion, as noted by Francisco R. Adrados, had been 'contaminated' with the fable about "The Dolphin and the Monkey" (Aesop. 73 P. [= 75 Hsr.; 306 Ch.]) by the Cynics, who often criticized the nobility of lineage.[37] It may also not be a coincidence that this fragment comes from a chapter on methods of arousing laughter. Quintilian concludes this section by remarking: *similis in apologis quoque et quibusdam interim etiam historiis exponendis gratia consequi solet* ("Similar attractive effects follow from expounding fables or sometimes even some episodes from history", *Inst*. 6.3.44 fin.; transl. Russell). Here, Quintilian is apparently following

34 On this fragment, cf. now Raschieri 2018, 88.

35 See Münzer 1924, 411–413; *MRR* 2.223; David 1992, 865; Dettenhofer 1992, 32 n. 57. Russell 2001, 82 n. 32 suggests that he may have accompanied Cato in 49 BCE when the latter received command of that province, probably *pro praetore* (*MRR* 2.263).

36 See esp. Hdt. 1.23–24 (adapted by Gell. *NA* 16.19); Plin. *HN* 9.28; Lucian. *Dial. mar*. 8. The authors of the preliminary exercises in rhetoric (*progymnasmata*) cite this story as an example of διήγημα that can be easily refuted by means of an argument from what is impossible: Theon *Prog*. 93 Spengel; Hermog. *Prog*. 2.10, 5.11; cf. Lib. *Prog*. 2.29 and on the subject Gangloff 2002, 34.

37 See Adrados 2003, 100. Cf. Adrados 1999, 514, and McDermott 1935, 176: "a burlesque of the famous legend of Arion and the dolphin."

Cicero (*De or*. 2.264), who includes fabulous narratives (*narrationes apologorum*) among the sources of situational humour.[38] Naturally, it is impossible to ascertain whether Cicero would have regarded Caelius' narrative as an *apologus* in that sense, because both the dramatic date and the date of the composition of his dialogue precede the latter's speech. As for Quintilian's view, he probably did not detect any hints of an Aesopic fable there; otherwise, he would not have included the *apologi* and *historiae* as another potential source of humour. However, some subtleties may have eluded his notice. If, following the Cynic philosophers, we substitute Arion with a monkey, a potential parallel between individual referents could be drawn. Caelius might be suggesting that Laelius is being disingenuous about his true identity, like the monkey: although D. Laelius' father, who served under Pompey in Spain, "was a respected figure and may have had senatorial status before the Sullan dictatorship",[39] he did not belong to the consular branch of that family and, consequently, Laelius the younger was not a *nobilis*.[40] Caelius may thus be mocking Laelius' claims to noble ancestry, but due to the fragment's lack of context this must remain a speculative interpretation.

When we compare the wording of the two passages, we observe that both Cicero and Caelius employ the verb *aio* in a similar sense, although for slightly different reasons. Whereas it is used impersonally in the third *Philippic*, marking the expression as proverbial,[41] it accompanies a definite subject in the fragment quoted by Quintilian. Caelius attributes this narrative to the Sicilians, renowned for their wit,[42] to distance himself from a story that might otherwise be dismissed as incredible (cf. n. 36 above). In doing so, he seems to be adhering to Aristotle's advice (from a now lost text) cited by Theon of Alexandria in the chapter *On Fable*:

> Κλιτέον δὲ τοὺς μύθους ὡς καὶ τὴν χρείαν εἴς τε τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς καὶ τὰς πλαγίους πτώσεις. Μάλιστα δὲ ἐμμελετητέον ταῖς αἰτιατικαῖς, ὅτι καὶ οἱ παλαιοὶ τοὺς πλείστους τῶν μύθων

38 Cf. Nøjgaard 1964, 128; Price 1975, 123–124; Rabbie et al. 1989, 291 *ad loc*.

39 Gruen 1995, 185–186; cf. Cic. *Flac*. 2, 18; *MRR* 2.95.

40 See Shackleton Bailey 1977, 391 on Cic. *Fam*. 8.4.2 [= 81 SB]; Gruen 1995, 198 n. 138. *Contra* Dettenhofer 1992, *loc. cit*.

41 OLD s.v. *aio* 4b.

42 See e.g. Cic. *De or*. 2.217 with Rabbie et al. 1989, 213; Corbeill 1996, 94. In fact, Caelius could have drawn inspiration from Cicero's *Verr*. 4.95: *Numquam tam male est Siculis quin aliquid facete et commode dicant, uelut in hac re aiebant in labores Herculis non minus hunc immanissimum uerrem quam illum aprum Erymanthium referri oportere* ("Sicilians are always ready with some appropriate jest, even under the most trying circumstances; thus on the present occasion they observed that this monstrous hog ought to be counted among the labours of Hercules quite as much as the celebrated Erymanthian boar"; transl. Greenwood).

> οὕτως ἀπήγγειλαν, καὶ μάλα ὀρθῶς, ὥς φησιν Ἀριστοτέλης· οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτῶν προσώπου λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἀναφέρουσιν, ἵνα παραμυθήσωνται τὸ δοκεῖν ἀδύνατα λέγειν.
> (Theon *Prog*. 4 [74 Spengel])

> Fables should be inflected, like the chreia, in different grammatical numbers and oblique cases, and one should give special attention to the accusative cases, because that is the way the ancients told most of the myths, and very rightly, as Aristotle says; for they do not relate myths in their own person, but they attribute them to antiquity in order to excuse the fact that they seem to be saying what is impossible.
> (Transl. Kennedy)

What Theon means, essentially, is that fables become more appealing when they are presented by means of accusative and infinitive constructions (i.e. in indirect discourse). In both his example (from a dialogue by Phaedo the Socratic) and in Caelius, the sentence comprises a subject accusative and a verb in the infinitive (χαρίσασθαί τινα […] σκύμνον / [*eum*] *sedisse et* […] *transuectum* [*esse*]), governed by a *verbum dicendi* (Φασὶ τοίνυν […] / *aiebant*). Although Theon's example can be classified as a fable (catalogued by Adrados as "S. 50" [= Phaedo, *Zopyr*. *fr*. 1 Rossetti: "The King's Son and the Lion's Cub"]), the principle it illustrates appears more applicable to myths, at least based on the extant speeches.[43] Therefore, it would be counterintuitive not to consider Caelius' fragment as a mythological *exemplum*.[44] In relation to the passages discussed in this section, we would, in my view, need to stretch the evidence too far to conclude that Aesopic fables were used in extant speeches as a means of persuasion.[45] This raises a further question: why did Roman orators, who were fond of mythological allusions and proverbial expressions, avoid fabulous narratives?

43 On similar strategies employed by Cicero with regard to Greek mythology, cf. Pierzak 2016, 260–262.

44 Cf. n. 42. It is important to emphasize that, in the passage quoted above, Theon does not differentiate between fable and myth. When introducing this distinction, I rely on Quintilian (*Inst*. 5.11.18–21), whose discussion of various types of *exempla* was heavily influenced by Aristotle. I am grateful to L. Spielhofer for bringing these methodological difficulties to my attention.

45 Our conclusions are constrained owing to limited data, as the scanty fragments of Roman Republican orators other than Cicero were preserved only in the indirect tradition. We cannot know for certain that none of the 176 orators listed by E. Malcovati in *ORF* made use of Aesopic fables.

5 Ancient historiography and the fable in action

An anecdote about Q. Sertorius[46] will hopefully shed some light on the matter. At some time between 79 and 77 BCE,[47] when he could not prevent his army of Spaniards from engaging the Romans with their entire force, Sertorius turned to a strategy referred to as "a fable in action."[48] Valerius Maximus provides the following account:

> duos enim in conspectu eorum constituit equos, ualidissimum alterum, <alterum> infirmissimum, ac deinde ualidi caudam ab imbecillo sene paulatim carpi, infirmi a iuuene eximiarum uirium uniuersam conuelli iussit. obtemperatum imperio est. sed dum adulescentis dextera irrito se labore fatigat, senio confecta manus ministerium exsecuta est. tunc barbarae contioni, quorsum ea res tenderet cognoscere cupienti, subicit equi caudae consimilem esse nostrum exercitum, cuius partes aliquis adgrediens opprimere possit, uniuersam conatus prosternere celerius tradiderit uictoriam quam occupauerit.
>
> (Val. Max. 7.3.6)

> He put two horses in front of them, one very powerful, the other very weak. Then he ordered the tail of the powerful horse to be plucked gradually by a feeble old man and the tail of the weak horse to be torn off whole by a young man of exceptional strength. His command was obeyed. But while the young man's hand tired itself in fruitless effort, the hand enfeebled by old age executed its service. Then he put it to the assembly of barbarians,[49] who wanted to know where this was tending, that the Roman army was like a horse's tail: anyone who attacked its parts could overcome it, but if he tried to floor the whole of it, he would more likely give the victory than gain it.
>
> (Transl. Shackleton Bailey)

What we are dealing with here is a sort of live enactment of a story (αἶνος διὰ πράγματος), the meaning of which the audience can more easily discern by direct engagement. Although it would not be considered a fable by modern standards, as no explicit story had been *told*, its images assume the role fulfilled by verbal communication in a narrative, allowing the spectators to draw certain conclusions. In this case, because his soldiers had no idea what this narrative was about, Sertorius had to provide the explanation, which he did in a manner suggestive of

46 Attested by Val. Max. 7.3.6; Plut. *Vit. Sert*. 16; Frontin. *Str*. 1.10.1 [= 4.7.6] and alluded to by Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.45–46 and Plin. *Ep*. 3.9.11. See Konrad 1994, 152.

47 Cf. *MRR* 2.90 and Konrad 1994, 152.

48 See Karadagli 1981, 72–75. Cf. the terminological overview in Kurke 2011, 398–399.

49 It is worth noting that in Plut. *Vit. Sert*. 16.9, Sertorius addresses his allies as ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι, while at the beginning and the end of that chapter (16.1 and 11) and often elsewhere (6.5; 9.6; 14.1; 20.1; 25.4), they are referred to as βάρβαροι. See Konrad 1987, 526 n. 25.

a fable-author stating the moral (ἐπιμύθιον). As with the anecdotes about Demosthenes and Demades, the historicity of this performance cannot be ascertained. Even if Enrica Malcovati was right to omit the passages listed in n. 46, above, from her collection of the fragments of Roman orators, they align, to some extent, with what we know from another source about Sertorius' manner of speaking. Cicero (*Brut*. 180) regards him as *solutissimum in dicendo et acutissimum* ("the readiest and shrewdest in speaking") among those orators of senatorial rank, who were *plane indocti et inurbani aut rustici etiam* ("quite without training and without manners, or even uncouth"; transl. Manuwald). The Romans could easily imagine someone depicted as *inurbanus* and *rusticus* telling an animal fable at an assembly, especially if his audience was far less educated than himself.

It appears that the use of Aesopic fables was often associated with self-taught individuals, especially those characterized by a natural instinct and ready wit in conversation. Another person who belongs to this group is Viriatus, the leader of the Lusitanians (147–139 BCE). From a fragment of the *Histories* of Posidonius of Apamaea[50] preserved by Diodorus Siculus, we learn about his wedding to the daughter of Astolpas of Tucca. On that day, according to our source, he expressed his astonishment at how eagerly the people of Tucca switched sides, aligning themselves now with the Romans, now with himself. To illustrate their instability,[51] Viriatus told Astolpas the fable about the middle-aged man and his two wives, perhaps better known[52] as "The Middle-Aged Man and the Hetaerae" (Aesop. 31 P. [= Hsr.; 52 Ch.]): "A middle-aged man had two mistresses [wives], a young one and an old one. The latter pulled out his black hair and the former his grey hair, so he ended up bald."[53] Viriatus' conclusion was that in their struggle against two hostile forces, the inhabitants of Tucca would disappear as quickly as the hair from the middle-aged man's head. Unlike Caelius' story, there is no difficulty in classifying this anecdote as a fable,[54] and here we have the additional advantage of possessing the rhetorical context. However, this passage, again in contrast to the fragment of Caelius, would be better described as a dialogue rather than a speech. Although it remains unclear what Astolpas' reaction was, we can safely assume that he would have been regarded by the Romans as a person comparable to the members of Sertorius' audience.

50 Posidon. *fr*. 105b Theiler [= Diod. Sic. 33.7.4–7]. Cf. van Dijk 1997, 283–284.

51 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 284.

52 Cf. esp. Babr. 22.

53 As summarized by Adrados 2003, 44. Cf. Zafiropoulos 2001, 96.

54 On its Cynic character, see Adrados 1999, 527; 2003, 45; on different versions of this fable (apart from Babrius, see also Phaed. 2.2 Z. [= G.]), cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 374.

6 Conclusion: fable and the rules of propriety

This brings us back to Quintilian, who, in the chapter *De exemplis,* mentions that the power to persuade simple-minded people is a characteristic of fables. His exact words are as follows:

> ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum, qui et simplicius quae ficta sunt audiunt, et capti uoluptate facile iis quibus delectantur consentiunt.
>
> (Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.19)

> They often attract the mind, particularly that of uneducated rustics [*praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum*], who listen to fiction in a simpler spirit and, in their delight, readily assent to things they enjoy hearing.
>
> (Transl. Russell)

Whether or not Quintilian himself was acquainted with the anecdotes discussed in the previous section, the passage just quoted and the narratives of Sertorius' performance provide mutual support for each other. Even if the story about Sertorius was concocted, similarly to those about Demosthenes and Demades, the fabricator must nonetheless have recognized that fables are particularly effective and appealing to uneducated audiences. As an example supporting this assertion, Quintilian cites the fable of "The Stomach and the Feet" (Aesop. 130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.]), a variant of which (usually referred to as "The Belly and the Members") was recounted by Menenius Agrippa to the Roman plebs to dissuade them from their secession in 494 BCE. The most renowned account of this story is found in Livy,[55] who summarizes Agrippa's speech in *oratio obliqua* (2.32.9–12). Commenting on that passage, Robert M. Ogilvie suggested that the fable was reported indirectly by the historian because, as a plebeian himself, Menenius "was supposed to speak *prisco illo et horrido modo*" (32.8). "To represent such archaic uncouthness directly", Ogilvie goes on to argue, "would offend against the canons of writing history."[56] Christoph Pieper has recently challenged this argument, noting that

55 This speech is attributed to Menenius Agrippa also by Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.83–86, Cass. Dio 4, *fr*. 17.9–11, Plut. *Vit. Cor*. 6.2–5, and Zonar. 7.14.7–9. According to other sources (Cic. *Brut*. 54, Plut. *Pomp*. 13, Val. Max. 8.9.1, *CIL* 11.1826 = *ILS* 50), it was delivered by the dictator Manius Valerius. On the dubious historicity of this account, see Müller 2004, 451 n. 4 (the list of sources), and Pieper 2016, 161–164. See also Zafiropoulos 2001, 101 n. 39. On the reception of this fable, cf. Martorana (in this volume).

56 See Ogilvie 1965, 313.

Ogilvie may have relied too heavily on Quintilian's definition of fable.[57] The fable recorded by Livy has been variously interpreted as an attempt to legitimize the authority of the patricians or, conversely, to blame them for the Struggle of the Orders.[58] Regardless of the interpretation, Menenius (referred to as a *vir facundus*) is portrayed as a politician who knows precisely how to address the specific audience of the plebeians.[59] Whether Quintilian is following Livy's version or not, the information regarding the suitability of fables for such a particular audience is independently confirmed in the accounts about Sertorius. In each case, our sources depict the speakers as individuals compensating for their lack of rhetorical training with life experience and practical wisdom.

With the exception of Aristotle's example involving Aesop,[60] all the anecdotes we have examined are situated within a deliberative context. However, given its absence from real oratory, this phenomenon should be seen as a literary trend, one that was probably influenced by rhetorical theory. If the narration of Aesopic fables was indeed a known practice in Athenian oratory of the 5th century BCE,[61] and if it did indeed find its way into handbooks of rhetoric, it seems to have declined rapidly and fallen out of use by the time the extant speeches of the Attic orators were delivered. The sole evidence for the use of animal fables in ancient oratory from the Classical period thus lies in historiography and literary biography. Two recurrent themes can be identified in these texts: (1) the speaker narrates a fable in response to an interruption from the audience; and (2) either the speaker who employs an Aesopic fable (such as Sertorius) or his audience (e.g. the Roman plebs in 494 BCE) are depicted as unsophisticated. The first theme relates to Athenian orators of the 4th century BCE, while instances of the second theme span various periods of Roman history. Although accounts falling under the first theme appear to illustrate the application of a precept found in Latin handbooks

57 See Pieper 2016, 174 n. 56. Perhaps Livy chose indirect speech because he assumed that his readers would be familiar with the exercise in composition (*progymnasma*) which involved retelling a fable in either direct or indirect speech.

58 See Müller 2004, *passim* (esp. 470–474), who challenges the traditional interpretation of this fable as reflecting, by analogy, the hierarchical structure of Roman society. He argues that Livy criticizes the upper classes for their lust for power and perfidy, while simultaneously portraying them as indispensable for the commonwealth.

59 Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.83.2: ὁ δὲ τά τε ἄλλα, ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν, πιθανωτάτοις ἔδοξε χρήσασθαι λόγοις καὶ τοῦ βουλήματος τῶν ἀκουόντων ἐστοχασμένοις ("He seemed to employ in general the most persuasive arguments possible and those which gauged well the inclinations of his audience"; transl. Cary). On Dionysius' introduction of Menenius' speech, see Pieper 2016, 168.

60 Cf. Karadagli 1981, 30.

61 Thus Konstantakos 2021, 246–247.

of rhetoric, it remains doubtful whether such handbook recommendations would prove effective on the speaker's platform in Republican Rome. The Romans frequently encountered uncooperative or even hostile audiences, where the ability to command the crowd hinged on one's *auctoritas*.[62] In this context, any attempt to employ an animal fable during a tumultuous *contio* would probably have proved counterproductive. Similar considerations extend to the use of fables as a subtype of rhetorical induction. Although fables and historical *exempla* are both supposedly useful in deliberative oratory, it is challenging to envision a Roman orator favouring a fable over a historical *exemplum* in such a context.[63] Furthermore, the passage from Cicero's third *Philippic* and the fragment *incertae sedis* of Caelius illustrate the orator's caution in avoiding any direct connection with elements even remotely reminiscent of a fabulous narrative. All of this considered, it appears that an orator could deploy an animal fable only in exceptional circumstances. Cicero (*Inv. rhet.* 1.25) suggests that one way to captivate a less attentive audience is to begin with a jest containing a fable, but only *si res dabit* ("if the case permits") and *si rei dignitas adimet iocandi facultatem* ("unless the seriousness of the occasion denies an opportunity for a jest"; transl. Hubbell). Pseudo-Demetrius, in his treatise *On Style* (157), echoes a similar caveat. Although he includes fables, along with proverbs and comparisons, among the sources of elegant style, he warns that μῦθος δὲ λαμβανόμενος καιρίως εὔχαρίς ἐστιν ("fable is attractive only when inserted at the right moment"; transl. Innes).[64] This evokes the restrictions imposed by the rules of propriety (πρέπον, *decorum*). A speaker well versed in these rules had to assess what was allowed or prohibited in a given communicative situation. Most importantly, he needed to be attentive to the composition of his audience, considering factors such as their mood, social or political standing, age, and level of sophistication. At first glance, fables, with their rather ordinary plotlines and humble animal characters, seemed best suited for less well-educated

62 Cf. now Kenty 2020, 125–126, and *passim*.

63 Cf. n. 6.

64 Cf. van Dijk 1997, 42–43. According to Aristotle, the use of maxims (γνῶμαι) and myths or fables (μῦθοι) was appropriate only for those of advanced age (*Rh.* 1395a): ἁρμόττει δὲ γνωμολογεῖν ἡλικίᾳ μὲν πρεσβυτέρων, περὶ δὲ τούτων ὧν ἔμπειρός τις ἐστίν, ὡς τὸ μὲν μὴ τηλικοῦτον ὄντα γνωμολογεῖν ἀπρεπὲς ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ μυθολογεῖν, περὶ δὲ ὧν ἄπειρος, ἠλίθιον καὶ ἀπαίδευτον ("It is fitting for someone more advanced in age to speak in maxims, and about things he has experience of, since it is inappropriate for someone not of that age to speak in maxims, just as it is also to tell myths, and to do so about things he is inexperienced in, this being a mark of foolishness and lack of education"; transl. Bartlett).

and illiterate listeners.[65] This perception may be attributed, in part, to the fact that, as a form of prose writing commonly encountered in childhood, they were "ingrained in grammatical instruction"[66] and, in Quintilian's words (*Inst*. 1.9.2), *fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt* ("followed on directly from the pupils' nurses' stories"; transl. Russell),[67] which may have further dissuaded orators from employing them before a more sophisticated audience. It would be intriguing to explore how this perspective on fables evolved during the Imperial age, when practical oratory lost its political significance, but such an examination is a matter for a separate study.

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65 Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.19; cf. Price 1975, 191, 193; Adamik 1982, 59; Jedrkiewicz 1989, 54–55, 424; Gazich 1990, 117; van Dijk 1993, 180. Strong's 2021, 277, comment on this passage from Quintilian ("the fable is a perfectly acceptable genre for use in elite settings") is somewhat misleading in a rhetorical context, as this interpretation should be confined to its application in poetry (at p. 276 n. 93, he refers to *Inst*. 5.6.20–23 citing Hor. *Epist*. 1.1.73).

66 Cribiore 2001, 202; cf. 178.

67 Cf. Suet. *Gram. et rhet*. 25.4; Plut. *Mor*. 14e; Nicol. *Prog*. 5 . See on the subject, e.g. Bonner 1977, 253–254, and Viljamaa 1988, 179–180, 191.

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Simona Martorana

Nemo aliquid ualet sine suis: Classical and Medieval Latin Versions of "The Belly and the Members" across Literary Genres

Abstract: This paper focuses on the unique combination of literary genres that characterizes the reception of "The Belly and the Members" across Classical and Medieval Latin sources. Attested in the *Collectio Augustana* (Aesop. 130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.]), this apologue is not extant in Phaedrus, but its main motifs feature in works in other literary genres, such as historiography (Livy; Dionysius of Halicarnassus), Socratic dialogues (Xenophon's *Memorabilia*), anecdotal warfare literature (Polyaenus' *Stratagems*), and political biography (Plutarch). Although it is adapted to the patterns of each genre in which it is resituated, "The Belly and the Members" is acknowledged, either directly or indirectly, to be Aesopic material. After traveling across several literary genres, in the Medieval *Romulus* (*RG*), "The Belly and the Members" returns to being a fable on its own terms and (again) finds its place in a collection of fables.

1 Introduction

The apologue generally known as "The Belly and the Members" tells that one day there was a dispute between the stomach and one or more other body parts.[1] The body part(s) maintain that their role is more important for the body than that of the stomach; as soon as the function of the stomach is explained, the limbs understand that the body cannot work without a belly that can receive nourishment. Certain sources indicate that this understanding comes too late, namely when the limbs get so weak that the whole body perishes. This chapter examines several versions of this tale, which has had a wide reception across the ages and literary genres, partly changing its meanings and functions in the process. I start my survey with the "Aesopic" fable attested in the *Collectio Augustana*, namely Aesop.

1 For the spread of the apologue under the label of Aesop's fable in popular culture, see the recent collection by Gibbs 2002. For the oriental origin of this fable, see Adrados 2000, 106–107; also Kaufmann 1996, 61; Gombel 1934, 1–27. The number and typology of the limbs mentioned in the narrative change according to the source, as I show later.

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130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.].[2] Given the long-lasting and ongoing debate surrounding the figure of Aesop, the indication of "The Belly and the Members" as "Aesopic" does not refer to the origin of the fable. This definition is rather an acknowledgement of the traditional attribution of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" to Aesop as an emblematic figure for the genre of fables, and accordingly the equivalence between "Aesopic" and "belonging/pertaining to the genre of fables".[3] Aesop. 130 P. therefore functions as a starting point for the analysis of generic patterns and themes, as well as being the first term of comparison for other attestations of the story.[4]

After analysing Aesop. 130 P., I will navigate the presence of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" across Greek (Xenophon, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Polyaenus, and Plutarch) and Roman Classical authors (Livy), to conclude with the *Romulus*, a Medieval Latin collection of fables.[5] Through this survey,[6] I show how the nucleus of the fable is re-incorporated into other literary genres, and accordingly is transformed in its contents and nuances. While returning to again become part of a collection of fables in the Medieval *Romulus*, "The Belly and the Members" preserves several aspects of its journey across various sources and literary genres.

2 Although I start with Aesop, I do not necessarily imply the chronological priority of the Aesopic fable over the other versions: while the *Collectio Augustana* drew from and collected much older motifs and traditions, the uncertainty over its sources and date of composition (presumably 1st–2nd century CE) makes it impossible to establish definite chronological relationships between the Aesopic fables and other sources. For a discussion of the date and origin of the *Augustana*, see Adrados 1999, 60–74.

3 The highly conventional characterization of the genre of fables as "Aesopic" reflects the need within the Greek cultural framework to provide an inventor for each literary genre. A quasi-legendary figure, Aesop is mentioned for the first time by Herodotus (2.134–135), who speaks of him as a slave from Thrace, contemporary to Sappho. Aesop may well be a literary and cultural construction, but his name and the adjective "Aesopic" became synonyms for the genre of fables. For a summary of the use of the name of Aesop, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 10–12.

4 For the meaning, tradition, and wide reception of "The Belly and the Members", see Hale 1968, 377–388; Peil 1985 (see 8–17, for the fable in Roman historiography); Zafiropoulos 2001, 101–102; Adrados 2003, 170–172; van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051.

5 For a critical edition of the Medieval *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910. More recently, two of the three redactions have been published separately: see Feller 2018; Martorana 2024.

6 In this chapter, I do not intend to examine all the occurrences of "The Belly and the Members", which is widely attested: see Dicke/Grubmüller 1987, 483–488 (n. 408); van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051. I will focus on the versions that exhibit a more obvious re-adaptation of the fable theme to the features of the genre within which the apologue is re-incorporated.

2 Livy, Xenophon, and Polyaenus: in the shadow of Aesop

Not attested in Phaedrus, "The Belly and the Members" has traditionally been ascribed to the Aesopic corpus, where it stands as follows:[7]

> Κοιλία καὶ πόδες περὶ δυνάμεως ἤριζον. παρ' ἕκαστα δὲ τῶν ποδῶν λεγόντων ὅτι τοσοῦτον προέχουσι τῇ ἰσχύι ὡς καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν γαστέρα βαστάζειν, ἐκείνη ἀπεκρίνατο "ἀλλ', ὦ οὗτοι, ἐὰν μὴ ἐγὼ τροφὴν προσλάβωμαι, οὐδὲν ὑμεῖς βαστάζειν δυνήσεσθε."
> Οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν στρατευμάτων μηδέν ἐστι τὸ πολὺ πλῆθος, ἐὰν μὴ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἄριστα φρονῶσιν.
>
> (Aesop. 130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.])

> The belly and the feet were contending for power. But when the feet said on every occasion that their strength was so great that they could also support the stomach itself, the belly replied: "Yet, my dears, if I did not get food, you would not be able to support anything".
> In a similar way, also a great multitude is of no use to armies if the generals are incapable of making the best decisions.
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

In Aesop, the feet and the belly are the body parts involved in the action, and the only ones mentioned openly. After the feet have shown their intention to fight for supremacy, the belly engages in a dialogue with them: ἀλλ', ὦ οὗτοι, ἐὰν μὴ ἐγὼ τροφὴν προσλάβωμαι, οὐδὲν ὑμεῖς βαστάζειν δυνήσεσθε ("Yet, my dears, if I did not get food, you would not be able to support anything"). In the epimythium, the relationship between the belly and the feet is compared to the military sphere: ἐπὶ τῶν στρατευμάτων μηδέν ἐστι τὸ πολὺ πλῆθος, ἐὰν μὴ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἄριστα φρονῶσιν ("a great multitude is of no use to armies if the generals are incapable of making the best decisions"). The agency of the body parts here replaces the humanization of animals, which is very common in the corpus of Aesop, as well as a prevailing — but certainly not exclusive — feature of fables as a genre.[8] Along with this agency, the contest within the human body is a central motif, which is developed further in other sources and literary genres.

Among the various ways the fable of Aesop has been interpreted, Hale has singled out two main approaches:[9] the elemental, whereby the apologue exempli-

7 For the text of the fable, see Perry 1952, 371–372.

8 Recently see Lefkowitz 2018, 57–62; Korhonen 2019, 211–231.

9 Hale 1968, 377–380; see also Hale 1971, 18–32 for the connection between this fable and the idea of the body politic across Greek, Roman, and Christian sources; Zafiropoulos 2001, 101–102.

fies the harmony among the four elements or bodily humours; and the structural (or socio-political), where the fable is interpreted as a metaphor for political balance, thus articulating the concept of *homonoia* (ὁμόνοια), the political agreement that unites the Greek *polis*.[10] This political and metaphorical reading is central to most of the sources that incorporate the motif of "The Belly and the Members", which acknowledge, or at least imply, that it belongs to the genre of fable. In Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (2.32), for instance, the fable is used by Menenius Agrippa to persuade the plebs to return to Rome after their secession in 494 BCE.[11] Menenius reportedly compares the stability and well-being of the state to the health of a human body.[12]

> Placuit igitur oratorem ad plebem mitti Menenium Agrippam, facundum uirum, et quod inde oriundus erat, plebi carum. Is intromissus in castra prisco illo dicendi et horrido modo **nihil aliud quam hoc narrasse fertur**: **tempore quo** in homine non, ut nunc, omnia in unum **consentiant**, sed singulis membris suum cuique **consilium** suus sermo fuerit, indignatas reliquas partes sua cura suo labore ac **ministerio** uentri omnia quaeri, uentrem in medio quietum nihil aliud quam datis uoluptatibus frui; **conspirasse** inde ne manus ad os cibum ferrent, nec os acciperet datum, nec dentes quae acciperent conficerent. hac ira dum uentrem fame **domare** uellent, ipsa una membra totumque corpus **ad extremam tabem** uenisse. inde apparuisse uentris quoque haud segne ministerium esse, nec magis ali quam alere eum, reddentem in omnis corporis partes hunc quo uiuimus uigemusque, diuisum pariter in uenas, maturum confecto cibo sanguinem. **Comparando hinc quam intestina corporis seditio similis esset irae plebis in patres, flexisse mentes hominum**.
>
> (Livy, 2.32.8–12; emphases mine)

> They therefore decided to send as an ambassador to the commons Menenius Agrippa, an eloquent man and dear to the plebeians as being one of themselves by birth. On being admitted to the camp *he is said merely to have related the following* (apologue), in the old-fashioned and uncouth style of that age. *In the days when* man's members did not all *agree* amongst themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own *ideas* and a voice of its own, the other parts were angered that they should have the worry and the trouble and *the task* of providing everything for the belly, while the belly remained quietly in their midst with nothing to do but to enjoy the good things which they bestowed upon it. They therefore *conspired* together that the hands should carry no food to the mouth, nor the mouth accept any-

10 The development of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" was reconstructed by Wilhelm Nestle's early study (1927, 350–360), which centres on the sources of Menenius Agrippa's apologue in Livy. For the reception of this fable in later authors, see Peil 1985; Patterson 1991, 111–137; for an overview of the versions of this fable, see Adrados 2003, 170–172.

11 See Gardner 2019, 50–51; Pieper 2016, 161–164. For an analysis of the fable in relation to its historical context, see Emberger 2020, 77–91; for the role of Menenius' apologue within the narrative structure of Livy's work, see Chaplin 2003, 195–213.

12 The text and translation (with minor changes) are from Foster 1919.

> thing that was given it, nor the teeth grind up what they received. While they sought in this angry spirit to *starve* the belly *into submission*, the members themselves and the whole body were reduced to *the utmost weakness*. So it had become clear that even the belly had no idle task to perform, and was no more nourished than it nourished the rest, by giving out to all parts of the body that by which we live and thrive, when it has been divided equally amongst the veins and is enriched with digested food — that is, the blood. *Drawing a parallel from this to show how alike was the internal dissension of the bodily members to the anger of the plebs against the Senators, he convinced the minds of his listeners.*
>
> (Transl. after Foster, with minor changes)

Menenius' story is a rhetorical speech within Livy's historiographical work, which succeeds in changing the minds of the people listening to him: cf. *comparando hinc quam intestina corporis seditio similis esset irae plebis in patres, flexisse mentes hominum*, where the gerund *comparando* articulates the exemplary nature of the story, whereas the perfect infinitive *flexisse* evokes the context of rhetorical treatises. In fact, Menenius does not make the comparison himself, but, rather, his speech is reported indirectly by Livy's authorial persona. On the one hand, this choice enhances the overlap of literary genres, as the tale combines historiography, oratory, and fable; on the other hand, indirect speech suggests that the story is a well-known and traditional one, thus stressing its exemplary and metaphorical significance. The highly metaphorical meaning of the tale is also conveyed by certain linguistic choices that recall a political vocabulary: cf. *consentiant*, *consilium*, *conspirasse*, *domare*, *ministerium*, all of which have a political meaning;[13] *tabes* would be used in later sources to "connote the putrid decay ubiquitous in Rome beset by plague";[14] *intestina* […] *seditio* is a well-known phrase to indicate civil war.[15]

Building upon this political connotation, Andrew Feldherr interpreted Menenius' speech as the articulation of a new relationship between the individual and the body politic, which reflects Livy's perception of the passage from the Republic to the Principate.[16] Similarly, Hunter Gardner understands the apologue as an example of how bodily fragmentation foregrounds social and political dissolution.[17] Harvey considers Menenius' speech to be the archetypical model for the subsequent parallels between society and the human body, which would be widely used in political and literary discourse in the centuries to come.[18] Furthermore, the

13 Cf. OLD s.v. c*onsentio, consilium, conspiro, domo, ministerium*.

14 Gardner 2019, 51.

15 Cf. ThlL online VII 2.5.58–11.15, s.v. *intestinus*: "in imag. vel translate (ad corporis similitudinem spectantur vel res publica vel aliae societates […])" (VII 2.9.42–43).

16 Feldherr 1997, 136–157.

17 Gardner 2019, 50–51; see also Hale 1971, 26–32.

18 Harvey 2007, 4–10; *passim*.

apologue can be read in relation to ancient medical theories. In Hippocratic medicine, which was "transplanted" to Rome (to re-adapt an expression of Vivian Nutton),[19] the body was seen as a ὁμοεθνίη (namely, an "organic unity"), and the notion of a physical organism was merged with the idea of the human being as a structural whole.[20] Accordingly, the corruption or idleness of one part of the body was thought to affect the whole organism — including its abstract components. This theory can be fruitfully applied to Menenius' conception of the Roman state, where the lack of *concordia* may cause the ruin of the Republic.

In Livy's historiographical work, the nucleus of the Aesopic fable is thus adapted to the political context and to the canons of historiography, while incorporating certain features of other genres, as well as medical knowledge. The apologue is cast as a rhetorical speech and is characterized by military and political vocabulary; it is a digression, but it has a structural function within the historical narrative; it also evokes ancient medical theories. Moreover, Menenius' parable draws on the genre of fables. First, on a narratological level, the apologue is clearly introduced as a separate story within a larger story, namely Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, as the expression *narrasse fertur* suggests.[21] The introduction of the apologue ("when man's members did not all agree amongst themselves [...] but had each its own ideas and a voice of its own") stylistically recalls the genre of fables, which are placed in an undefined past through the use of formulaic language; indeed, *tempore quo* has been linked to the beginning of a Greek αἶνος (cf. ἦν ποτε χρόνος ὅτε), namely a fable.[22]

The (covert) recognition of the motif as Aesopic material is confirmed by a later passage of Quintilian (*Inst.* 5.11.19–20). While referring to Aesopic *fabellae* as a way to persuade the simple-minded and uneducated, Quintilian mentions the fable of "The Belly and the Members", and links it to the speech by Menenius Agrippa.[23] This reference not only underscores the connection between the Aesopic

19 Nutton 2013, 160–173.

20 Cf. *Epid.* 2.1.6; *Loc.Hom.* 1; *Mul.* 2.174; *Vict.* 1.6; *Nat.Hom.* 3; *Morb.* 4.32, with Craik 2020, 188–190. For a general discussion on holism in ancient medicine, see the contributors to Thumiger 2020.

21 The apologue must have been known in Roman history earlier than Livy, but there is no agreement on when exactly the tale firstly appeared; see Ogilvie 1965, 312–313; Pieper 2016, 162–164, with notes.

22 Ogilvie 1965, 312–313.

23 Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19: *Illae quoque fabellae quae, etiam si originem non ab Aesopo acceperunt* (*nam uidetur earum primus auctor Hesiodus*), *nomine tamen Aesopi maxime celebrantur, ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum, qui et simplicius quae ficta sunt audiunt, et capti uoluptate facile iis quibus delectantur consentiunt: si quidem et Menenius Agrippa* [...] ("Consider also those fables which, though not originating with Aesop — for Hesiod seems to be the

fable and Menenius' speech, but may also allude to Livy's version, as Quintilian states that "it is recounted" that Menenius Agrippa "reconciled plebs and patricians by means of the famous story of the quarrel of the limbs against the belly" (*si quidem et Menenius Agrippa plebem cum patribus in gratiam traditur reduxisse nota illa de membris humanis aduersus uentrem discordantibus fabula*).[24] While *traditur* can be read as an Alexandrian footnote to the apologue in Livy, the *nota illa* […] *fabula* reveals that the story must have been well-known, as well as being connected to Aesop, as Quintilian's previous remarks confirm (cf. *Inst*. 5.11.19).[25] Livy does not openly say that Menenius is drawing from an Aesopic fable, but the use of stylistic features and vocabulary that belong to the genre of fable, as well as Quintilian's reference to the connection between Menenius' apologue and Aesop's fables, imply an acknowledgment of "The Belly and the Members" as a fable theme.

Livy's implied acknowledgment aligns with other re-elaborations of the fable, such as those of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.3.18) and Polyaenus (3.9.22). In the former, while engaged in dialogue with Chaerecrates, Socrates mentions *en passant* the example of "a pair of hands" refusing "the office of mutual help" and of "a pair of feet" neglecting "the duty of working together."[26]

> Νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἔφη, διάκεισθον, ὥσπερ εἰ τὼ χεῖρε, ἃς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τῷ συλλαμβάνειν ἀλλήλαις ἐποίησεν, ἀφεμένω τούτου τράποιντο πρὸς τὸ διακωλύειν ἀλλήλω ἢ εἰ τὼ πόδε θείᾳ μοίρᾳ πεποιημένω πρὸς τὸ συνεργεῖν ἀλλήλοιν ἀμελήσαντε τούτου ἐμποδίζοιεν ἀλλήλω.
>
> (Xen. *Mem.* 2.3.18)

first author of them — are best known under Aesop's name: they often attract the mind, particularly that of the uneducated and rustics, who listen to fiction in a simpler spirit and, in their delight, readily assent to things that they enjoy hearing. So Menenius Agrippa […]"). For the text and translation (with minor changes), see Russell 2002.

24 On the didactic aim of fables, see Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2: *Igitur Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant* ("Let them learn then to tell Aesop's fables, which follow on directly from their nurses' stories, in pure and unpretentious language; then let them achieve the same slender elegance in a written version").

25 Quintilian continues by giving a definition of the fable as a genre: Αἶνον *Graeci uocant et* Αἰσωπείους*, ut dixi,* λόγους *et* Λιβυκούς*, nostrorum quidam, non sane recepto in usum nomine, apologationem* ("the Greeks call this an *ainos* ['tale'], and speak of Aesopic fables as I said and 'Libyan fables'; some Roman writers use the word *apologatio,* though the name has not been accepted in common use", *Inst*. 5.11.20).

26 The text and translation (with minor changes) of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* are from Marchant/Todd/Henderson 2013.

> "Now what if a pair of hands," he said, "refused the office of mutual help for which the god made them and tried to thwart each other; or if a pair of feet neglected the duty of working together, for which they were fashioned, and took to hampering each other?"
>
> (Transl. after Marchant/Todd/Henderson, with minor changes)

The motif of the struggle within the body is incorporated within Xenophon's Socratic dialogue, thus acquiring a functional role within Socrates' argument.[27] While a surface-level reading suggests that there are no open references to the genre of fable, Socrates has been acknowledged to have connections to Aesop, and, accordingly, to (Aesopic) fables: not only is his life linked to Aesop's, but he is also known as a storyteller,[28] and he features in Phaedrus' collection.[29] As Socrates is linked to Aesop and therefore to the fable as a genre, his mention of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" enhances his role as a fable-teller. Within the context of a philosophical dialogue, this role may serve to remind the reader of Socrates' rhetorical strategy, which is based on exemplary stories, among other things.[30] In a similar way, in Polyaenus' *Stratagems*, a work combining warfare and anecdotal literature, the motif of "The Belly and the Members" is implicitly connected to the genre of fables.[31]

> Ἰφικράτης τὴν σύνταξιν τῶν στρατοπέδων εἴκαζε τῷ σώματι. θώρακα ἐκάλει τὴν φάλαγγα, χεῖρας τοὺς ψιλοὺς, πόδας τὴν ἵππον, κεφαλὴν τὸν στρατηγόν. "τὰ μὲν δὴ ἄλλα ὅταν ἐπιλείπῃ, χωλὸν καὶ πηρὸν τὸ στρατόπεδον· ὅταν δὲ ὁ στρατηγὸς ἀπόληται, τὸ πᾶν ἄχρηστον οἴχεται."
>
> (Polyaenus, *Strat*. 3.9.22)

> Iphicrates compared the composition of armies to the body. He called the phalanx the breast, the light-armed troops hands, the cavalry feet, and the general the head. "When the

27 In these sections of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates discusses the importance of kindness, friendship, and cooperation (cf. Xen. *Mem*. 2.3.14–19).

28 On the one hand, Aesop as a figure is linked to Socrates, particularly in Plato; on the other hand, his *mythoi* represent a model in style and content for Plato's mimetic Socratic dialogues; see Kurke 2006, 6–52; McPherran 2012, 50–60; Capra 2019, 89–113; Luchetti, in this volume. While the parallel between the two figures is characterized by both similarities and differences, and an overlap between them is sometimes denied (see e.g. *Phd*. 60c, with Luchetti and Bottini, in this volume), the existence of a tradition where Socrates was linked to Aesop confirms his connection to the genre of fables as a whole; see Zafiropoulos 2011, 203–216.

29 Cf. Phaed. 3.9 Z. [= G.], which is about friends, as well as *app*. 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.].

30 For the rhetorical implications of Socrates as a narrator in Plato's dialogues, see e.g. Bowery 2007, 82–110.

31 Polyaenus was active in the 2nd century CE. The text of Polyaenus' *Stratagems* is from von Woelfflin/Melber 1887; the translation is mine.

> other parts were lacking, the army was defective and flawed; but when the general was lost, it was totally useless."
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

The human breast, hands, feet, and head are compared to different components of the army (respectively, the phalanx, the foot soldiers, the cavalry, and the general), with a motif that recalls the morality of Aesop's apologue: if the head, namely the general, is lacking, the whole army is bound to be defeated. As in the previous examples, the fable theme serves the purpose of Polyaenus' work, as well as adhering to the canons of the genre. With the Aesopic version, Polyaenus shares the military context, as well as the fight within the body, thus perpetuating the image of civic strife. At the same time, the belly is replaced by the head, which more clearly hypostasizes the idea of (military) leadership and responsibility. The head also articulates hierarchical power, which characterizes the army and, in many cases, the state as well. While the motif seems to be entirely incorporated and translated into the new genre, there is a linguistic hint at the tradition that saw "The Belly and the Members" as a fable, namely the verb εἰκάζω, which can here be translated as "to compare".[32] Alongside pointing out the exemplary meaning of the comparison, εἴκαζε also recalls Livy's *comparando* closing Menenius' apologue. Accordingly, the verb inscribes Iphicrates' comparison (at least to some extent) into a tradition that saw the fight between the limbs and the central system (either the belly or the head) as an element pertaining to the genre of fables. At the same time, through its inclusion in the work of Polyaenus, the fable acquires further anecdotal aspects, which can be ascribed to the general's personal experience, while keeping its metaphorical and figurative as well as exemplary meaning.

In the instances mentioned so far, we have seen how the motif of "The Belly and the Members" develops across three sources, being re-incorporated into different literary genres while also fulfilling their aims: in Livy, the fable has an exemplary and metaphorical meaning, serving Menenius' rhetorical strategies; in Xenophon, it enhances Socrates' status as a philosopher by establishing a connection with another semi-legendary sage, namely Aesop; in Polyaenus, it helps to convey further anecdotal nuances to the narrative. While the sources analysed in this section show an implicit awareness of the tradition of "The Belly and the Members" as a fable, the next section will explore case studies where the apologue is more openly acknowledged as "Aesopic".

32 See LSJ s.v. εἰκάζω.

3 Dionysius and Plutarch: in the light of Aesop

A more direct mention of "The Belly and the Members" as Aesopic material can be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*. Active in the first century BCE, Dionysius is roughly contemporary to Livy.[33] When introducing Menenius' speech, Dionysius expressly mentions the proximity between Menenius' story and the Aesopic tradition, by stressing how "at the end of his speech he is said to have related a kind of fable that he composed after the manner of Aesop (εἰς τὸν Αἰσώπειον τρόπον) and that bore a close resemblance to the situation of the moment, and by this means chiefly to have won them over" (τελευτῶν δὲ τῆς δημηγορίας λέγεται μῦθόν τινα εἰπεῖν εἰς τὸν Αἰσώπειον τρόπον συμπλάσας πολλὴν ὁμοιότητα πρὸς τὰ πράγματα ἔχοντα, καὶ τούτῳ μάλιστ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.83).[34] The story reads as follows in Dionysius:

> Ἔοικέ πως ἀνθρωπείῳ σώματι πόλις. σύνθετον γὰρ καὶ ἐκ πολλῶν μερῶν ἐστιν ἑκάτερον· καὶ οὔτε δύναμιν ἔχει ἕκαστον τὴν αὐτὴν τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς μερῶν οὔτε χρείας παρέχεται τὰς ἴσας. εἰ δὴ λάβοι τὰ μέρη τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου σώματος ἰδίαν αἴσθησιν καθ᾽ αὑτὰ καὶ φωνήν, ἔπειτα στάσις ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐμπέσοι καθ᾽ ἓν γενομένοις τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασι πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα μόνην, καὶ λέγοιεν οἱ μὲν πόδες, ὅτι πᾶν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἐπίκειται τὸ σῶμα· αἱ δὲ χεῖρες, ὅτι τὰς τέχνας ἐργάζονται καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἐκπορίζουσι καὶ μάχονται πολεμίοις καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ὠφελήματα παρέχουσιν εἰς τὸ κοινόν· οἱ δὲ ὦμοι, ὅτι τὰ ἄχθη πάντα ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς κομίζεται· τὸ δὲ στόμα, ὅτι φθέγγεται· ἡ δὲ κεφαλή, ὅτι ὁρᾷ καὶ ἀκούει καὶ τὰς ἄλλας αἰσθήσεις περιλαβοῦσα πάσας ἔχει δι᾽ ὧν σώζεται τὸ πρᾶγμα· εἶτα φαῖεν πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα· Σὺ δ᾽, ὦ χρηστή, τί τούτων ποιεῖς ἢ τίς ἐστιν ἡ σὴ χάρις ἡμῖν καὶ ὠφέλεια; ἀλλὰ σύ γε τοσοῦτον ἀπέχεις τοῦ πράττειν καὶ συγκατορθοῦν ἡμῖν τι τῶν κοινῇ χρησίμων ὥστε καὶ ἀντιπράττεις καὶ ἐνοχλεῖς καὶ, πρᾶγμα ἀφόρητον, ὑπηρετεῖν ἀναγκάζεις καὶ φέρειν ἀπανταχόθεν εἰς τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν σεαυτῆς ἐπιθυμιῶν. φέρε, τί οὐ μεταποιούμεθα τῆς ἐλευθερίας, καὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἀφιέμεθα πραγματειῶν ἃς ἕνεκα ταύτης ὑπομένομεν᾽; εἰ δὴ ταῦτα δόξειεν αὐτοῖς καὶ μηδὲν ἔτι δρῴη τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον, ἔσθ᾽ ὅπως ἂν ἐπὶ πολὺ διαρκέσαι δυνηθείη τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἂν ἐντὸς ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν τῷ κακίστῳ τῶν μόρων ἀναλωθείη, λιμῷ; οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι ἄλλως τις εἰπεῖν. τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον ὑπολάβετε καὶ περὶ πόλεως […].
>
> (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.86)

> A commonwealth resembles in some measure a human body. For each of them is composite and consists of many parts; and no one of their parts either has the same function or per-

33 For Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his context, see Hunter/de Jonge 2018; for an example of the differences in stylistic and historiographical techniques between Dionysius and Livy, see e.g. Oakley 2010, 118–138; for the relationship between Livy and Greek historians, see Champion 2014, 190–204 (198–201 for Dionysius of Halicarnassus more specifically).

34 The text and translation (with minor changes) of the *Roman Antiquities* are from Cary 1943. For a recent analysis of Menenius' apologue in Dionysius, see Pieper 2016, 164–170.

> forms the same services as the others. If, now, these parts of the human body should be endowed, each for itself, with perception and a voice of its own and a sedition should then arise among them, all of them uniting against the belly alone, and the feet should say that the whole body rests on them; the hands, that they ply the crafts, secure provisions, fight with enemies, and contribute many other advantages toward the common good; the shoulders, that they bear all the burdens; the mouth, that it speaks; the head, that it sees and hears and, comprehending the other senses, possesses all those by which the thing is preserved; and then all these should say to the belly, "And you, good creature, which of these things do you do? What return do you make and of what use are you to us? Indeed, you are so far from doing anything for us or assisting us in accomplishing anything useful for the common good that you are actually a hindrance and trouble to us and — a thing intolerable — compel us to serve you and to bring things to you from everywhere for the gratification of your desires. Come now, why do we not assert our liberty and free ourselves from the many troubles we undergo for the sake of this creature?" If, I say, they should decide upon this course and none of the parts should any longer perform its office, could the body possibly exist for any considerable time, and not rather be destroyed within a few days by the worst of all deaths, starvation? No one can deny it. Now consider the same condition existing in a commonwealth [...].
>
> (Transl. after Cary, with minor changes)

The apologue is much longer in Dionysius than in previous or contemporary accounts, and has a more dialogic structure, with the parts of the body (feet, hands, shoulders, mouth, head) directly addressing the belly. The speech of the body parts makes the Dionysian apologue quasi-comedic, which further connects it to fables, as comedic features also characterize the fable as a genre.[35] At the same time, Dionysius' narrative combines patterns from the genre of historiography with rhetorical elements, showing a closeness to Livy.[36] Similarly to Livy, Dionysius has Menenius draw on stylistic and thematic features of the genre of fables, giving more authority to his speech and incorporating it into the narration of historical events. In Dionysius, however, the inclusion of the apologue within the genre of Aesopic fables is stated more openly, specifying what was left implicit in Livy. This direct mention makes the blending of literary genres (historiography, oratory, fable, as well as comedy) appear more explicit, and, plausibly, it may have made it more easily recognizable by, and engaging for, the readers.

In the later version of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (*Coriolanus* 6), an example of political biography, the awareness that the story of "The Belly and the Members"

35 For the interactions between fable and comedy, see e.g. Adrados 1999, 240–286; Hall 2013, 277–297; Pütz and Gärtner, in this volume.

36 For an overview of the intersections between oratory and historiography in the Roman period, see Laird 2009, 197–213; on speeches in Classical historians, see also Marincola 2007, 118–132 (126–127 for Dionysius).

originates in the genre of fables appears to have consolidated even further, as Menenius Agrippa is said to have "concluded his discourse with a celebrated fable" (τελευτῶντι τῷ λόγῳ περιῆλθεν εἰς σχῆμα μύθου διαμνημονευόμενον).[37]

> ἔφη γὰρ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὰ μέλη πάντα πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα στασιάσαι, καὶ κατηγορεῖν αὐτῆς ὡς μόνης ἀργοῦ καὶ ἀσυμβόλου καθεζομένης ἐν τῷ σώματι, τῶν δ᾽ ἄλλων εἰς τὰς ἐκείνης ὀρέξεις πόνους τε μεγάλους καὶ λειτουργίας ὑπομενόντων· τὴν δὲ γαστέρα τῆς εὐηθείας αὐτῶν καταγελᾶν, ἀγνοούντων ὅτι τὴν τροφὴν ὑπολαμβάνει μὲν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἅπασαν, ἀναπέμπει δ᾽ αὖθις ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ διανέμει τοῖς ἄλλοις. "Οὕτως οὖν," ἔφη, "καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου λόγος ἐστίν, ὦ πολῖται, πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τὰ γὰρ ἐκεῖ τυγχάνοντα τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπιμελείας καὶ οἰκονομίας βουλεύματα καὶ πράγματα πᾶσιν ὑμῖν ἐπιφέρει καὶ διανέμει τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ ὠφέλιμον."
>
> (Plut. *Vit. Cor.* 6)

> He said, namely, that all the other members of the human body once revolted against the belly, and accused it of being the only member to sit idly down in its place and make no contribution to the common welfare, while the rest underwent great hardships and performed great public services only to minister to its appetites; but that the belly laughed at their simplicity in not knowing that it received into itself all the body's nourishment only to send it back again and duly distribute it among the other members. "Such, then," said Agrippa, "is the relation of the senate, my fellow citizens, to you; the matters for deliberation which there receive the necessary attention and disposition bring to you all and severally what is useful and helpful."
>
> (Transl. after Perrin, with minor changes)

As has been demonstrated,[38] Plutarch may have drawn on both Livy and Dionysius, as Menenius' speech is reported in indirect speech and the vocabulary employed is characteristic of political or legal discourses, as well as evoking civic strife: cf. στασιάσαι, κατηγορεῖν, λειτουργίας.[39] Contrary to Livy, Plutarch has the belly laugh (καταγελᾶν) and reply to the body parts. This alteration may be due to the influence of the Dionysian version, which is more dialogic and comedic, or may simply be a variation on the Livian model. The laughter may also be a result of interest in anecdotal evidence, which to some extent characterizes Plutarch's biographical work more significantly than more strictly historiographical works (cf. Livy and Dionysius). This difference is important for generic interactions: while acknowledging the apologue's similarity to, or identity as, a fable (μύθου), Plutarch incorporates a laugh within it, that is, a motif of the genre of comedy as well as a stock motif of anecdotal literature. This coexistence demonstrates the permeability of fables as a genre, as observed throughout this chapter.

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37 Text and translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are from Perrin 1916 (with minor changes).

38 See e.g. Russell 1963, 21–28.

39 Cf. LSJ s.v. στασιάζω, κατηγορέω, λειτουργία.

Not extant in Phaedrus' corpus, implicitly attributed to the genre of fables in Livy, Xenophon, and Polyaenus, and more explicitly acknowledged as Aesopic material in Dionysius and Plutarch,[40] "The Belly and the Members" features again, at a later stage, in a collection of fables: the Medieval *Romulus* (*RG*).

4 The Medieval Latin *Romulus* (*RG*): back to (Aesopic) fables?

The last example of the evolution of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" is fable 3.16 [= Thiele 66] of the *Recensio Gallicana* (*RG*) of the Latin *Romulus*.[41] An anonymous collection of fables from the Middle Ages,[42] the *Romulus* draws mainly on the corpus of Phaedrus and the Latin translations of Aesop that circulated in the Medieval period. The *Romulus* has been divided by its principal editor, Georg Thiele, into three main redactions: the *Recensio Gallicana* (*RG*), the *Recensio Vetus* (*RV*), and the *Recensio Wissenburgensis* (*RW*).[43] I base my analysis on the text of *RG*, which is the most famous of the three redactions and which I recently published as an updated critical edition. In *RG*, "The Belly and the Members" reads as follows:

> Qui suos stulte deserit, se potius decipi sciat.
> Nemo aliquid ualet sine suis, ut partes corporis humani. De quibus dicitur indignatas esse manus et pedes, et uentri cibum dare noluerunt eo quod sine ullo labore repleretur, illo sedente otioso. Manus autem et pedes aduersus eum indignantes laborare noluerunt et negauerunt seruitium. Venter uero esuriens clamabat. At illi per paucos dies nihil dare uoluerunt. Ieiuno autem uentre membra omnia lassauerunt. Postea uero, cibum dare

40 Another interesting occurrence of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" can be found in biblical writings, specifically in Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians* (12.12–26). Here, the body symbolizes Christ and the Christian Church, whose parts should maintain unity as the bodily members do. For the connection between Livy's Menenius and St. Paul's letter, see Pérez López (2014), 1087–1093; for biblical parables as fables, see Strong in this volume.

41 For the Latin *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910; for a more concise overview of the tradition of the *Romulus*, see Martorana 2024, 3–9.

42 For some discussions of the date and place of composition, as well as authorship, of the *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910, X–XXXVI, CXV–CXXIX; Mann 2014, 113–140; more recently, Zago 2016, 1–35; 2017, 351–362.

43 Thiele drew on the work of Léopold Hervieux. Hervieux (1884/99 vol. I, 330, 685–707) had made a distinction between the *Romulus ordinaire* and the *Romulus de Vienne* which, to some extent, anticipate Thiele's *RG* and *RV*, respectively.

> uolentes, recusauit uenter, quia iam clauserat uias. Sic membra et uenter simul lassa intereunt.[44]
>
> (*Rom.* [*RG*] 3.16 [= 66 Thiele])

> Those who foolishly abandoned their fellows must know that they, first of all, deceive themselves. Nobody is capable of doing anything without their members, such as the parts of the human body. Concerning those, the hands and feet were said to be angered, and did not want to give food to the belly, since it was filled without making any effort, but simply sat lazily. So, the hands and feet, being angered at the belly, did not want to carry out their task and denied their service. Accordingly, the belly, hungry, started complaining; but they did not want to give anything (to it) for several days. Since the stomach was empty, however, all the limbs became weak. Later, as they truly wanted to give food, the belly rejected it, since it had already closed the access. Thus, the limbs and the belly died together, exhausted.
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

While the main model for most of the fables contained in the *Romulus* must be sought in the collection of Phaedrus, this apologue is not preserved among his extant fables, as already mentioned. This absence does not mean that "The Belly and the Members" was never included in Phaedrus' corpus, since it may have been lost in the process of textual transmission; yet the fact that we cannot currently draw any comparisons with the text of Phaedrus encourages us to seek other models. In terms of sources, it is very unlikely that the *Romulus* drew on the Greek text of the Aesopic fable (since in Medieval western Europe the Greek language was mostly unknown); the text is more plausibly based on one of the many paraphrases of Aesop or Phaedrus in Latin that circulated in the Middle Ages. In this fable, *RG* may also have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Livian account.[45]

Among similarities to previous versions, it is worth noting that the fable of *RG* features specific parts of the human body, namely hands and feet, echoing the feet that are the only parts of the body mentioned in Aesop. 130 P. Moreover, the notion that at some point the belly rejected food is found only in *RG*. This rejection may be an indirect reminiscence of the words uttered by the belly in Aesop: "if I did not get/accept food, you would not be able to support anything" (indeed, the Greek verb προσλαμβάνω can be translated as "to accept", "to take in", or "to get").[46] An influence from the Livian account may be gathered from what we can loosely define as an intertextual link: both in *RG* and Livy, the parts of the body are described as "angered" (*indignatas*). Moreover, further thematic similarities

44 The Latin text is from Martorana 2024.

45 Cf. Thiele 1910, LIV–LV.

46 See LSJ s.v. προσλαμβάνω.

can be observed in the description of the belly's idleness (*uentrem in medio quietum nihil aliud quam datis uoluptatibus frui*, Livy 2.32; *eo quod sine ullo labore repleretur, illo sedente otioso*, *RG*), and in the collapse of the body as a whole (*ipsa una membra totumque corpus ad extremam tabem uenisse*, Livy 2.32; *ieiuno autem uentre membra omnia lassauerunt*; *sic membra et uenter simul lassa intereunt*, *RG*). Distinct from other sources, *RG* does not report a concluding statement to explain the meaning of the fable. In his edition, by contrast, Thiele adds an epimythium (*monet haec <fabula> famulos esse fideles, quia per hoc fortes sunt et manent*, "this fable advises that the servants be loyal, since in this way they can be and remain strong");[47] yet this epimythium is not found in the witnesses of *RG*, with one notable exception.[48]

At the thematic level, *RG* seems to include different patterns that "The Belly and the Members" incorporated throughout the ages and across different literary genres. At the same time, after crossing several literary genres, "The Belly and the Members" has returned to being a proper fable in *RG*, where it presents features that are distinctive to the fable as a genre: the moral (expressed in the promythium); an emphasis on the independent agency of the body parts (which goes back to Aesop. 130 P.); and phrases that contribute to the construction of the quintessential framework of fables (e.g. *de quibus dicitur*).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has, I hope, shown how the Aesopic motif of "The Belly and the Members" develops across literary genres. The nucleus of the fable is, from time to time, expanded upon or modified according to generic patterns, serving the aims and scope of the work in which it is re-incorporated. In Livy, the fable serves Menenius' rhetorical strategies, as well as representing a break in the narration of historical events in the form of an exemplary digression; in Xenophon, it enhances Socrates' status as a philosopher and as a legendary figure; Polyaenus uses the motif to add authority and at the same time an anecdotal flavour to his narrative; both Dionysius and Plutarch state the origin of the tale more openly to emphasize the overlap in literary genres that is intrinsic to their works. After various trans-

47 Thiele 1910, 220–223. For further observations on the text of this fable in (what is now commonly defined as) *RG*, see Gombel 1934, 50–52.

48 This is S, the *incunabulum* of Heinrich Steinhöwel (1476); see Thiele 1910, CLII; Martorana 2024, 18.

formations and adaptations, "The Belly and the Members" is found again in a collection of fables, namely the *Romulus*.[49] "The Belly and the Members" thus exemplifies how malleable and adaptable fables can be, to the point of being frequently re-incorporated in other works. This re-incorporation has often led to changes in many aspects of the story. At the same time, although it features in other genres and presents at times significant alterations, "The Belly and the Members" is still acknowledged (either directly or indirectly) as Aesopic material, that is, as a motif pertaining to the genre of fables. It is precisely this metamorphic and adaptive trait that has allowed the fable theme to survive over time.

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49 The fable has a wider reception in the Middle Ages and would go on to have a reception in modern and contemporary literary contexts, which I cannot explore in this contribution; for some references see van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051.

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Part V: **Fable and Ancient Novel**

Silvia Mattiacci

Crossings between Fable and Novel: Some Examples from Phaedrus and Apuleius

Abstract: Among all the ancient novels, the animal fable has a privileged relationship with the story of Lucius, whose metamorphosis into an ass subjects him to a fate of hunger, beatings, and unbearable labours, just as often happens to the donkeys of fable. This paper focuses on Phaedrus' version of the Aesopic fable and on Apuleius' version of Lucius' story: thanks to their poetics and thematic *uarietas*, they lend themselves to interesting intertextual parallels. First of all, the two Latin authors share the decision to rewrite a Greek original for a public of Roman language and culture, and both engage in a meaningful metaliterary dialogue with the reader. For this reason, we start from the analogies between the programmatic discourses with which, in a self-ironizing manner, both Phaedrus and Apuleius present to the reader humble and entertaining *fabulae* (which, however, conceal a deeper meaning); then we examine a series of thematic and linguistic convergences between their works (see esp. Phaed. 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 8.24–26; Phaed. *app*. 8 Z. [= *app*. 10 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 9.9–10; Phaed. *app*. 14 Z. [= *app*. 16 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 6.28; 7.13; 9.39). The elements we point out are not meant to demonstrate Apuleius' direct dependence on Phaedrus; rather, they constitute a significant testimony, in the Latin context, of osmosis between fable and novel, both of which are traditionally low and popular genres.

1 Programmatic convergences

The fable and the novel share a status as low genres, unworthy of serious readers and severe critics. In authors such as Phaedrus and Apuleius, who carry on an intense dialogue with the reader, this aspect is clearly indicated at the programmatic level. Indeed, these two authors display a shared attitude that aimed to belittle their own work, using terms that suggest the frivolous, half-serious nature typical of games and children's tales: Phaedrus, for example, refers to his fables with the words *ioci* (or *iocari*, *ludere*), *neniae*, and *argutiae*.[1] *Neniae*,[2] in particular,

1 Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol*. 7 Z. [= G.]; 2 *prol*. 5 Z. (but with *logus* instead of *iocus*) [= G.]; 3 *prol*. 10, 37 Z. [= G.]; 4 *epil*. 3 Z. [= G.]; 5.2.3 Z. [= 4.2.3 G.]; 5.7.2 Z. [= 4.7.2 G.]; *app*. 2.1 Z. [= G.]. On the poetics of *lusus* in Phaedrus, see esp. Lamberti 1980; Hamm 2000; Mattiacci 2008; Gärtner 2007; 2015, 43–47.

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calls to mind the atmosphere of the simple stories told to children, whose narrator par excellence is the nurse. This is made clear in Quintilian's[3] comparison of Aesop's fables to *fabulae nutricularum*, a comparison later picked up by Ausonius, who underscores their function as lullabies (*nutricis inter lemmata | lallique somniferos modos* ["amid nurse's tale and soporific strains of lullaby"], *Ep*. 9b.90 Green).[4] To these definitions should be added that of *aniles fabellae*, used by Horace to introduce the most famous fable of Antiquity, that of the country mouse and the city mouse.[5] Similarly, Apuleius refers to the various stories woven together in his novel as *fabulae lepidae* and *aniles.* In particular, in the *incipit* of the problematic prologue, an ambiguous *ego* promises the reader that it will weave *uarias fabulas* together and caress his ears *lepido susurro* (*Met*. 1.1.1),[6] where *susurrus* — not unlike *nenia* (vd. n. 2) — seems to allude both to the pleasing 'singsong' of a tale narrated in a soft voice and also to its magical, soporific enchantment. And it is just to console Charite, the maiden carried off by Lucius-the-Ass's first owners, and to lull her back to sleep when she was woken up by nightmares,

2 On this term, which Phaedrus uses twice, both times in reference to his own works (3 *prol.* 10 Z. [= G.] *uiles nenias*; 5.2.3 Z. [= 4.2.3 G.] cit. below n. 8), cf. Gärtner 2021, 92–93. Alongside the funereal and magical sphere (cf. OLD s.v. 1, 3), *nenia* refers specifically to a children's jingle in Hor. *Epist*. 1.1.62–63.

3 *Inst*. 1.9.2: *Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt* ("Aesop's fables, which follow on directly from nurses' stories"). Similarly, about the novel, cf. Macrob. *In Somn*. 1.2.8, where Petronius' and Apuleius' tales, full of fictitious adventures of lovers, are relegated to the cradles of nurses (*in nutricum cunas*).

4 In a verse epistle, Ausonius is presenting the *Apologi* of Iulius Titianus, a prose paraphrase of Aesopic fables in iambs intended for reading in early childhood to the son of the dedicatee, his friend Probus. On the problems posed by this passage and the identification of the author of the verse fables (Babrius or Phaedrus?), I refer to Mattiacci 2021, 111–115, with bibliography. The term *lemma* (here in the sense of "tale") seems chosen for its onomatopoeic assonance with *lallum* (or *lallus*), a *hapax* to be connected to the infantile sound *lallare* (cf. *nutrices infantibus, ut dormiant, solent dicere saepe: lalla, lalla, lalla: aut dormi, aut lacte* ["nurses usually say to infants to make them sleep: lalla, lalla, lalla: either sleep or suck milk"], *schol. Pers*. 3.18).

5 Hor. *Sat*. 2.6.77–81: *Ceruius haec inter uicinus garrit anilis | ex re fabellas* […] *sic incipit: "olim | rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur | accepisse cauo* […]" ("Now and then our neighbour Cervius rattles off old wives' tales that fit the case... he thus begins: 'Once upon a time a country mouse welcomed a city mouse in his poor hole [...]'"). Cf. also Philostr. *VA* 5.14, where asses and frogs are emblems of Aesopic wisdom suitable for old women and children (Finkelpearl 2018, 250).

6 On the prologue of the novel and the identification of the ambiguous *ego*, I limit myself to a reference to recent commentaries (with discussion of the enormous previous bibliography): GCA 2007, 8–26, 62–91; Graverini 2019, 138–149. On the definitions of *neniae* and *fabulae anilis*, which go back to a traditional self-mocking attitude that makes use of the image of a childish pastime as a cryptic clue to lead the reader to a serious philosophical and moral exploration, cf. Graverini/Keulen 2009, 198–204; Graverini 2012, 95–113.

that the robbers' old servant woman promises to distract her *narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis* ("with pretty stories and old wives' tales", *Met*. 4.27.8). And this is how, with Apuleius' typical authorial modesty, the *bella fabella* of Cupid and Psyche is introduced.

As I have noted elsewhere, the self-ironizing in these definitions is obvious, as their intention is to prevent and at the same time guard against the criticisms of *nasuti*[7] readers. Phaedrus' *neniae* may seem to be a game, but in fact they hide a deeper truth useful to the reader who knows how to examine them carefully, as the author himself makes clear in 5.2 Z. [= 4.2 G.], in accordance with the twofold intention to *delectare* and *docere*, which is shown to be his programme from the very first prologue.[8] Then again, if we consider the philosophical-religious implications that critics have always found in the plot of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and in the fable of Psyche in particular, we clearly see the seriocomic nature of these *fabulae*, which the untrustworthy narrators of the novel (Lucius or the robbers' old servant) present as mere *lepidae* and *aniles*, whereas in reality they, like the Aesopic fable, occupy the ambiguous space of the *spoudogeloion* of satiric ancestry, whose aim is to amuse and entertain (*delectare*) for a serious purpose (*docere*).

Another point of contact in the statements of the narrators of the fable and the novel is their claim to truthfulness, which is linked to the presumed realism demanded by the two genres: the more unbelievable the stories, the more marked is the reference to facts that actually occurred in their own time, to which they sometimes claim to have been eye-witnesses. It is significant that in one of Phaedrus' novelistic fables, in which he wants to show the dangers involved in *credere et non credere*, after two mythical examples (those of Hippolytus and Cassandra) he introduces a contemporary fact, as follows:

> Ergo exploranda est ueritas multum, prius
> quam stulta praue iudicet sententia.

7 Cf. Phaed. 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.] for the disparaging designation of a follower of high genres like *nasutus* (1) and *lector Cato* (21), on which see Mattiacci 2022a, 71–72.

8 Cf. Phaed. 5.2.1–7 Z. [= 4.2.1–7 G.]: *Ioculare tibi uidemur* [...] *sed diligenter intuere has nenias*; | *quantam sub illis utilitatem reperies!* [...] *rara mens intellegit* | *quod interiore condidit cura angulo* ("I seem to you to be fooling [...] but take a careful look into these trifles; what a lot of practical instruction you will find in tiny affairs! [...] it is the unusual mind that perceives what the artist took pains to tuck away in some inner nook"); 1 *prol.* 3–4 Z. [= G.]: *Duplex libelli dos est: quod risum mouet* | *et quod prudentis uitam consilio monet* ("A double dowry comes with this, my little book: it moves to laughter and, if you are careful, by counsels guides the conduct of life").

> **Sed, fabulosam ne uetustatem eleues**,[9]
> **narrabo tibi memoria quod factum est mea**.
>
> (Phaed. 3.10.5–8 Z. [= G.])

> Therefore, the truth ought be searched out thoroughly in advance before a foolish opinion leads to a wrong decision. But, lest you make light of my ancient examples, as being mythical, I will tell you of something that happened within my own memory.
>
> (Transl. Perry, with some adaptations)

This statement has significant echoes in the novel of Petronius when, to show women's constantly flighty and shameless nature, Eumolpus introduces the 'incredible' story of the matron of Ephesus:

> Ceterum Eumolpos [...] multa in muliebrem leuitatem coepit iactare [...] nullamque esse feminam tam pudicam, quae non peregrina libidine usque ad furorem auerteretur. **Nec se tragoedias ueteres curare aut nomina saeculis nota, sed rem sua memoria factam, quam expositurum** se esse, si uellemus audire.
>
> (Petron. *Sat*. 110.6–8)

> Then Eumolpus [...] began to hurl many taunts at the fickleness of women [...] how no woman is so chaste that she cannot be driven to mad distraction by lust for a foreigner. He was not thinking about those old ancient tragedies or names notorious in earlier ages, but an affair that happened in his own lifetime, which he would set out for us, if we wished to hear it.
>
> (Transl. Schmeling)

Similarly, some stories of magic in the *Satyrica* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are narrated by eye-witnesses, who are protagonists in the incredible events whose truthfulness they stress over and over again. Niceros and Trimalchio, for instance, make comments on the horror stories with which they entertain their guests at the dinner party, using phrases such as: *nolite me iocari putare; ut mentiar, nullius patrimonium tanti facio* ("don't think I am joking; I value no one's fortune so high that I'd lie about this", *Sat*. 62.6), or else *rogo vos, oportet credatis* ("I beg you to believe", *Sat*. 63.9). Similarly, the first tale in Apuleius' novel, in which the narrator Aristomenes and his friend Socrates are victims of the witch Meroe, is introduced by these eloquent words:

> Sed tibi prius deierabo Solem istum omniuidentem deum **me uera comperta memorare**, nec uos ulterius dubitabitis si Thessaliae proximam ciuitatem peruenieritis, quod ibidem passim per ora populi sermo iactetur quae palam gesta sunt.
>
> (Apul. *Met*. 1.5.1–2)

9 On the textual problems of this line, which I quote following the edition of Zago 2020, see Zago 2015, 91, and Gärtner 2021, 172 n. 19.

> But first I shall swear to you by the Sun, this all-seeing god, that I am narrating events which I know at first hand to be true; and you will have no further doubts when you arrive at the next town in Thessaly, for the story is circulating there on everyone's lips about what occurred in plain daylight.
>
> (Transl. Hanson)

The reference to personal experience and contemporary events is an artifice serving to guarantee the fictitious truthfulness of the fictional narrative. The fable, and Phaedrus in particular, does not refuse a priori the *fabulosa uetustas* (i.e. remote and mythical examples); indeed, in *app*. 6 Z. [= *app.* 7 G.], where the several mythical examples of the punishments of the Underworld are interpreted allegorically, it is stated at the end that *antiquitas* had deliberately concealed the truth so that only the wise man could fathom it.[10] Yet it is significant that the negative remark about the *fabulosa uetustas* refers in particular to tragedy, the main repository of the myths of Hippolytus and Cassandra, in contrast to which a novelistic theme linked to contemporary reality, in which the *diuus Augustus* appears, is introduced. It seems, therefore, that the clarification can also count as a programmatic declaration characterizing the low genre as linked to the modes of everyday reality.[11]

2 Apuleius, the Aesopic tradition, and Phaedrus' *res nouae*

These points of contact between fable and novel at the metaliterary level are reflected also in their content, with themes exchanged and interwoven between the two genres. Indeed, since the ancient fable long remained at the margins of literature and, given its markedly popular character, it gained entry only via the lower genres (iambic poetry, comedy, and in Rome above all satire, whose informal character was open to incorporating heterogeneous elements, including popular

10 Cf. 17–18: *Consulto inuoluit ueritatem antiquitas,* | *ut sapiens intellegeret, erraret rudis* ("It was by design that antiquity wrapped up truth in symbols, that the wise might understand, the ignorant go astray").

11 On the rhetorical expedient of referring to the present (cf. e.g. Sen. *Ep*. 24.11), and on the relation between the passage of Phaedrus and that of Petronius, cf. Vannini 2010, 28, 233; Gärtner 2021, 172 n. 22. On the hypothesis of "eine spielerische Distanzierung" ("a playful distancing") from tragedy in this passage of Phaedrus, cf. Gärtner 2021, 172–173; more generally on the relationship of Phaedrus to the tragic genre, cf. Gärtner 2017; Mattiacci 2022a (also with reference to the novel of Apuleius).

and everyday ones), the presence of Aesopic elements in the later but equally mixed and popular genre of the fictional narrative appears to be a continuation of this process of osmosis. At any rate, it is a decidedly interactive phenomenon: the fable, in the more literary and mature guise provided by Phaedrus, enriches Aesopic material, which was closely tied to animal guise, with novelistic motifs, while the Greek and Latin novel, in the complexity of its various plots, gives a home to prompts and motifs from fable, allusions to the Aesopic tradition, and complete apologues. In particular, the story narrated by Apuleius and his Greek source has as protagonist of a large part of the narrative an ass or, better, a man 'disguised' as an ass, just like the animals of the Aesopic tradition, though with the essential difference that he is deprived of their fundamental characteristic — the ability to speak. But to this we shall return.

On the presence and functions of the fable in the Greek and Latin novel overall, we refer to the detailed study of van Dijk.[12] On the *Metamorphoses* in particular, van Dijk lists a series of motifs deriving from the fabulist tradition (defined as 'non-fables'), which Apuleius borrows in a variety of ways, recasting them and adapting them to the plot and characters of his story.[13] A few examples will allow us to understand this method. A widespread popular belief about the beaver's instinctive ability to save its life by biting off its testicles, which contain the precious *castoreum* it is hunted for, is rewritten by Phaedrus (*app*. 28 Z. [= *app.* 30 G.]) in the form of an apologue with a final exhortation to free oneself from riches, which are always dangerous.[14] The same motif appears in *Met*. 1.9.2, where, however, it is not tied to a moral teaching, but rather to two of the novel's major themes, metamorphosis and castration: the witch Meroe, protagonist of the first embedded story, transforms an unfaithful lover into a beaver *quod ea bestia captiuitati metuens ab insequentibus se praecisione genitalium liberat, ut illi quoque simile proueniret* ("because when that animal is afraid of being captured it es-

12 van Dijk 1996.

13 van Dijk 1996, 514, 517–519; cf. also the *Index Locorum* in Adrados 2003, s.v. "Apuleius". Previous references to the Aesopic fable in Apuleius are found (starting from Crusius 1889) in van Thiel 1971, 184–186; Mason 1978, 10; Scobie 1975, 30–33. The parallels singled out concern essentially the Greek fable and are not always convincing, as has been well demonstrated by Finkelpearl 2018 in a contribution that offers new perspectives on Apuleius' use of the fable (mainly Greek, whereas the present study aims to focus above all on the relationship with Phaedrus, see below § 4).

14 On the same theme, see Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.], but Phaedrus romanizes the fable, using for "beaver" the term *fiber* and criticizing the Greeks and the Graecism *castor* (on this fable, see Schmalzgruber in this volume, 172–177). The *castoreum*, taken from an inguinal gland, was valued for its therapeutic properties. The belief in the beaver's self-castration is also accepted in writings on natural history (Plin. *HN* 8.109; Ael. *NA* 6.34; see also Juv. 12.34).

capes from its pursuers by cutting off its own genitals, and she wanted the same thing to happen to him").[15] Another example of a probable adaptation of a fable motif to the ass-protagonist of the *Metamorphoses* is the one, known in several versions (Babr. 11; Aphth. 38 [= Aesop. 283 P.]), of the incendiary fox, a metaphor for an attempt to harm others that rebounds on the practitioner: a man captures a fox and sets it loose with burning tow tied to its tail, to punish it for the damage it had caused to his vineyard (or to destroy his neighbours' abundant harvest), but instead the animal in its flight sets fire to the crops of the person who had acted so foolishly in the grip of anger (or of envy).[16] In Apuleius' version (*Met*. 7.19.4–20.3), the wicked owner is a *puer deterrimus*, to whom Lucius-the-Ass has been entrusted, and who torments him in every possible way, to the point of making him carry a load of tow with a burning ember inside; the animal manages to save itself by jumping into a deep pool, and the outcome of the story is therefore different. Yet, the punishment of the sadistic *puer* is merely postponed, while for the time being he mocks his victim, blaming the ass for the fire because he came too close to the neighbours' bonfires, and calling him *inigninus*[17] (something like an 'incendiary ass' instead of the well-known fox).

Thus, Apuleius' handling of fable materials does not seem to be very different from how he deals with proverbs, which he uses for narrative purposes. We need only think of the episode of the *tres utres inflati* ("three inflated goatskins") and the mock trial (*Met*. 2.32–3.18), in which proverbial expressions about wineskins — most famously the one about the haughty, vacuous nature of men, who are compared to "swollen wineskins" (also present in Petron. *Sat*. 42.4: *utres inflati ambulamus*) — are combined with and adapted to the story of the magically animated wineskins pierced by the sword of Lucius, the *utricida.* Or we need only think of the behaviour of the curious ass who, when he is being sought by some soldiers together with his current owner (the gardener), reveals his presence by peeking out of a little window of his hiding-place, an episode that is said to have

15 On the theme of castration as punishment and revenge in the *Metamorphoses*, cf. GCA 2007, 214.

16 On the myth of the incendiary fox, also taken up in an aetiological key in Ov. *Fast*. 4.691–712, see Mincione 1981. On Babr. 11 and this motif, see Spielhofer 2023, 218–231.

17 *Met*. 7.20.3: *"Quo usque ergo frustra pascemus inigninum istum?"* ("How long, then, shall we profitlessly feed this firebug?"). *Inigninum* is the reading of F, also transmitted by φ (with *igninum* in the margin) and accepted, though with much doubt, by several editors (cf. GCA 1981, 213–214): it may conceal a play on words (cf. Nicolini 2011, 135–136); Kenney 1998, 244, translates "incendiary ass" and Fo 2002, 327, "piroasino". The episode is also found in *Onos* 31, though without the reference to the neighbours and the ironic definition.

given rise to the proverb *de prospectu et umbra asini* ("about the peeping ass and his shadow", *Met*. 9.42).[18]

What is lacking, however, in the *Metamorphoses* are actual fables narrated *in extenso*, like those in Achilles Tatius' novel (2.21–22), where we find a sort of "fable fight", that is, a playful duel between two servants (Conops, Leucippe's untrustworthy servant, and Satyrus, Clitophon's cunning servant), who narrate two Aesopic fables in which the characters of the lion and the mosquito are clearly relevant to the narrators themselves. It is interesting to note here that the first fable, narrated by Conops, is closely related to the version found in anonymous collections of Aesop's tales (Aesop. 259 P. [= 292 Hsr.; 211 Ch.]), while that told by Satyrus, who will be victorious in the contest, is more rhetorically elaborate, longer, and richly adorned with musical and military metaphors, in comparison with the original version (Aesop. 255 P. [= 267 Hsr.; 189 Ch.]).[19]

At any rate, Apuleius shows specific interest in the Aesopic tradition, as is well illustrated by a passage in the *Florida*,[20] where, in answer to the request for an improvised speech, he declares his fear of winding up like Aesop's crow, introducing the fable as follows:

> At est hercule formido ne id mihi euenerit, quod coruo suo euenisse Aesopus fabulatur, id erit ne, dum hanc nouam laudem capto, paruam illam, quam ante peperi, cogar amittere. Sed de apologo quaeritis: non pigebit aliquid fabulari.
>
> (*Flor*. *fr*. 4.108 Beaujeu)

> But, by Hercules, I am worried that what Aesop says happened to his crow may happen to me; that is, that while I strive for this new prize, I may be compelled to forfeit what little glory I have already won. But you ask about the fable and I will not be sorry to tell you the story.
>
> (Transl. Hilton)

The brilliant lecturer follows this with two successive versions of the famous fable of the crow and the fox: one takes full advantage of the opportunity to amplify

18 On Apuleius' tendency to give a narrative dimension to proverbial expressions, cf. Brancaleone/Stramaglia 1993 (to whom I refer also for the documentation on the sources of the proverbs mentioned above); Finkelpearl 2018, 260–262; Graverini 2019, 338. On the connections between the cited passages by Petronius and Apuleius, cf. Ciaffi 1960, 106–108.

19 Cf. van Dijk 1996, 525–528. A typical example of continuous interweaving between fable and novel is the *Vita Aesopi*, where the numerous fables narrated by Aesop are embedded within the novelistic plot of his life (cf. van Dijk 1996, 530–541).

20 *Flor*. *fr*. 4.108–111 Beaujeu. The passage is part of the so-called "false prologue" of the *De deo Socratis*, generally considered to be a series of *excerpta* linked to the *Florida*; on this complicated and still-debated question, cf. Beaujeu 1973, 5–7, 161–162; Harrison/Hilton/Hunink 2001, 177–180; Martos 2015, xxxv–xxxvi.

and embellish the episode, while the other is characterized by the most concise *breuitas*. This approach recalls in certain ways that of Achilles Tatius, but it is used for the same fable. Thus, it seems to be an example of a concrete application, perhaps not without irony, of the scholastic practice of *progymnasmata*, in which the *Aesopi fabellae*, useful for the first exercises of the students of the *grammaticus*, were given a paraphrase *qua et breuiare quaedam et exornare saluo modo poetae sensu permittitur* ("in which it is allowed to abbreviate and embellish some parts, so long as the poet's meaning is preserved", Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2).[21] Even if — as is the norm — the fable is generically presented along with the label of *Aesopus*, it is not impossible to discern in Apuleius' 'baroque' reworking some lexical traces of Phaedrus, such as those concerning the position of the crow (far vaguer in the Greek versions): *sublime euectus, in quadam proxima quercu in summo eius cacumine tutus sedit* ("he flew up and perched safely on the top of a nearby oak", *Flor*. *fr*. 4.109: cf. Phaed. 1.13.4 Z. [= G.]: *celsa residens arbore* ["perched on a high tree"], perhaps mixed with 2.4.1 Z. [= G.]: *aquila in sublimi quercu nidum fecerat* ["an eagle had made her nest high up in a lofty oak"]).[22] Apuleius, on the other hand, when speaking of *offula* concerning the food stolen by the crow[23] — where the Aesopic versions mention a morsel of cheese (Phaedrus and Babrius), or of meat (Aesop) —, seems to have relied on more than one source, and to have tried in this way to get around their differences. What is more, he introduces details lacking in the Aesopic tradition (for instance, the initial competition between the two ani-

21 On Apuleius' rewriting as an expression of implementation of the progymnasmatic model, cf. Harrison 2000, 131–132; Pugliarello 2014, 78–79, who underscores its ironic purpose; Scappaticcio 2017, 20–22.

22 The well-known fable of the crow and the fox, also mentioned in Hor. *Sat*. 2.5.55–57, existed in several versions: Aesop. 124 P. [= 126 Hsr.; 166 Ch.]; Phaed. 1.13 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 77. The fable is also known from the bilingual scholastic tradition of the *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana* (Flammini 2004, 85, 2151–2164), on which see Scappaticcio, 2017, 20–22. On the fortunes of this fable theme from antiquity to modern times, see Bertini 2009; cf. also Adrados 2003, 160–165. For the lexical analogies with Phaedrus, whose text "sembrerebbe in qualche modo riemergere pur nel profluvio inventivo apuleiano" ("would seem to re-emerge somehow in the riot of Apuleius' inventiveness"), cf. Pugliarello 2014, 79–80; on the silence concerning the name of Phaedrus and the generic reference to *Aesopus* as *auctor* indicating a genre rather than the man himself, cf. Mattiacci 2021, 109–111.

23 *Flor*. *fr*. 4.108: *Coruus et uulpes unam offulam simul uiderant eamque raptum festinabant* ("A crow and a fox had caught sight of a scrap of food simultaneously, and were hurrying to snatch it up"). On *offula*, cf. Apul. *Met*. 1.4.1: *polentae caseatae* […] *offulam* ("bite of cheese pudding") with GCA 2007, 131.

mals and the mythological reference to the crow as a bird sacred to Apollo),[24] and multiplies the linguistic and stylistic ornaments (see e.g. *Flor*. *fr*. 4.110: *iam ipse alis persequax, oculis perspicax, unguibus pertinax* ["a bird that is impetuous in flight, perspicacious in sight, and tenacious in bite"]). But beyond this, what strikes us is the substitution of the moral[25] with reference to the occasion of speaking *ex tempore* (see above): and so in this case, too, and in a fable told *in extenso*, we can speak of a kind of updating.[26]

We find a connection more specifically to Phaedrus, and not only generically to the Aesopic tradition, in Apul. *Met*. 8.24–26, where Lucius-the-Ass is sold in the market to a disgusting *senex cinaedus*, one of those people from the dregs of society who carry the Syrian Goddess around to the sound of cymbals, forcing her to beg for alms.[27] All the bargaining between the auctioneer and the priest is interwoven with tongue-in-cheek insinuations alluding to asses' proverbial prowess in the erotic sphere[28] and to the buyer's passivity. This anticipates the following scene in which the priest, returning to his companions he apostrophizes as *puellae*, presents the *seruus pulchellus* he has purchased at the market, who will become their husband.[29] In the bargaining scene it may already be possible to recognize

24 But see also the fox's speech about the colours black vs. white in relation to the crow and the swan, whose song contrasts with the crow's supposed lack of voice (*Flor*. *fr*. 4.110).

25 Cf. Phaedrus' promythium (1.13.1–2 Z. [= G.]): *Qui se laudari gaudet uerbis subdolis | fere dat poenas turpi poenitentia* ("He who takes delight in treacherous flattery usually pays the penalty by repentance and disgrace"); instead, the epimythium should be considered spurious (13–14, on which see Zago 2020, 20).

26 On the use of the fable as *exemplum* in a rhetorical context, to which Apuleius refers here while dropping its symbolic meaning, see Finkelpearl 2018, 255–257.

27 *Met*. 8.24.2: *cinaedum et senem cinaedum, caluum quidem sed cincinnis semicanis et pendulis capillatum, unum de triuiali popularium faece, qui per plateas et oppida cymbalis et crotalis personantes deamque Syriam circumferentes mendicare compellunt* ("a pervert, and an old one at that; bald on top but with grey ringlets of hair hanging round his head; one of those common people from the dregs of society who walk through the city streets and towns banging their cymbals and rattles, carrying the Syrian goddess round with them and forcing her to beg").

28 The allusions are favoured by the presentation of the ass as a servant: *Met*. 8.24.4–25.1: *quin emis bonum et frugi mancipium?* […] *non asinum uides* […] *sed prorsus ut in asini corio modestum hominem inhabitare credas* ("why not buy yourself a good and useful slave? […] you see before you not an ass […] but you would really think that inside this ass's hide dwelt a mild-mannered human being"); there is clear irony in the claim of the auctioneer, who is unaware that he is in fact right. On the figurative sources relating to sexual activities between *cinaedi* and asses, cf. GCA 1985, 214; on the other hand, the phallic nature of the ass is well-known (cf. Scobie 1975, 31 n. 18), and Lucius himself is presented as an *amator* lusting after both sexes (7.21.2).

29 *Met*. 8.26.1–4: "*Puellae, seruum uobis pulchellum en ecce mercata perduxi.*" […] *non enim seruum, sed maritum illum scilicet sibi perduxisse. Et "Heus," aiunt "caue ne solus exedas tam bellum*

the inspiration of fable when the priest tries to make sure of the ass's docility, reacting to the sarcastic allusions of the *praeco* in these terms: *an me putas, inepte, iumento fero posse deam committere, ut turbatum repente diuinum deiciat simulacrum?* ("You fool, do you suppose I could entrust the goddess to an animal who was wild? He might suddenly upset her divine image and throw it off his back", *Met*. 8.25.4). Indeed, in a variant of the fable of the ass with the statue of a divinity on its back (Aesop. 267b Ch.), the animal thinks that passers-by are bowing down to him and, feeling proud, starts jumping about, at the risk of making the statue fall, which earns him a thorough beating from his owner.[30] Naturally, when the moral — that the ass's behaviour shows the folly of those who boast of others' merits — is removed, and the fable is adapted to the narrative context, the nature of the discourse is completely different.[31] But still more interesting is a comparison with another fable, particularly with Phaedrus' version:

Qui natus est infelix non uitam modo
tristem decurrit, uerum post obitum quoque
persequitur illum dura fati miseria.
Galli Cybebes circum <in> questus ducere
asinum solebant baiulantem sarcinas.
Is cum labore et plagis esset mortuus,
detracta pelle sibi fecerunt tympana.
Rogati mox a quodam, delicio suo
quidnam fecissent, hoc locuti sunt modo:
"Putabat se post mortem securum fore:
ecce aliae plagae congeruntur mortuo!"
(Phaed. 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.])

Whoso is born to ill luck not only runs out the course of life in sorrow but is also dogged after death by the hard misery of his fate.
The Galli, priests of Cybele, on their begging circuits used to take an ass around with them as porter for their luggage. When this ass was dead from overwork and beating they stripped

scilicet pullulum, sed nobis quoque tuis palumbulis nonnumquam inpertias." ("'Girls! Look what a pretty little slave-boy I've bought you' [...] 'You haven't brought us a slave,' they teased, 'but a husband for yourself. Hey! Don't eat up this pretty little chick all by yourself, but give your little dovies a piece sometimes.'"). Whereas the scene of bargaining in the purchase of the ass is absent in the *Onos*, that of the return of Philebus (this is the name of the priest who buys Lucius in both versions) to his companions is similar to that of Apuleius, though it is shorter (*Onos* 35–36).

30 In the best-known variant (182 P. [= 193 Hsr.; 267a Ch.]), the ass, made proud by the bows he thinks are meant for him, starts to bray and refuses to go forward.

31 Cf. Finkelpearl 2018, 257–259, who illustrates this procedure with the example mentioned above and with the episode of the soothsayer Diophanes (*Met*. 2.12–14, compare Aesop. 161 P. [= 170 Hsr.; 234 Ch.]).

> off his hide and made themselves tambourines of it. Afterwards, when they were asked by someone what they had done with their pet, this is how they put it: "He thought that after death he would rest in peace, but, behold, new blows are heaped upon him, dead though he is".
>
> (Transl. Perry)

The same fable is found in the Aesopic corpus (Aesop. 164 P. [= 173 Hsr.; 237 Ch.]) without any substantial differences,[32] except that the mendicant priests are called *Menagyrtai* and it is another group of them that asks where the ass has got to, whereas Phaedrus attributes this question to an unspecified outsider (*rogati* […] *a quodam*, 8), who mischievously alludes to the ambiguous relationship of the castrated *Galli* with the ass (*delicio suo*).[33] Apart from the common theme of the blows inflicted on the ass (an example of the cruelty of the Aesopic world, where beatings go on even *post mortem*, and a recurrent motif in Lucius' adventurous story), it is this mischievous wink in Phaedrus' fable that suggests a situation similar to that narrated by Apuleius in the episode of the Syrian goddess, where her priests are described using the obscene stereotype of the *cinaedus* (often represented by the *Gallus*, a eunuch priest of Cybele), and where the ass's bondage also suggests active participation in their dissolute practices of passive homosexuality.[34]

Besides describing Lucius' new owners as revoltingly effeminate, Apuleius also shows them to be fake beggars who exhibit themselves in frenetic dances pretending to be possessed (*Met*. 8.27–28) and who sell false prophecies (*Met*. 9.8). In the end, as they are leaving a village, they are approached by a group of armed men on horseback and accused of stealing a gold goblet from the local temple; the goblet is found in the lap of the statue of the goddess carried by the ass, and the priests are accused of sacrilege and led in chains to the local jail (*Met*. 9.9–10). The theft by characters who are *cinaedi*, and the blasphemous lie with which they mockingly try to exonerate themselves — claiming that the goblet is a *hospitale munus* that the temple goddess, the Phrygian Mother of the Gods, offered to the Syrian Goddess, her sister —, are motifs found in another of Phaedrus' fables (*app*. 8 Z. [= *app.* 10 G.]), based on a historical anecdote whose protagonists are an anonymous soldier and Pompey. The *miles* is universally considered to be a *cinaedus* and is described in terms similar to those Apuleius uses for his priests (*Pompeii miles* […] | ***fracte loquendo*** *et ambulando molliter* | *famam cinaedi*

32 Only partially conserved is the version of Babr. 141, which is interrupted after a more detailed description of the ass's duties and of the begging of the priests (*Galli*, as in Phaedrus).

33 Cf. Solimano 2005, 236. The ironic joke on the ambiguity of the term *delicium* (or *delicia*) is clear: it can mean both "dear" (in reference to persons or animals), but also "catamite".

34 Cf. what is said above and what is found in *Met*. 8.26.5–6 and 8.29.3–4, passages that have no counterpart in the *Onos*.

traxerat ["a soldier of Pompey [...], because he spoke in a high-pitched voice and walked with a lady-like gait, had acquired the reputation of being an effeminate creature"], 1–3: cf. ***fracta*** *et rauca et effeminata* ***uoce*** ["with their cracked, shrill, effeminate voices"], *Met*. 8.26.2); during the night he steals the mules carrying his general's garments, gold, and silver. When accused of the theft, he vigorously denies it, resorting to a *turpe ius iurandum*:[35] *ille continuo exscreat* | *sibi in sinistram et sputum digitis dissipat*: | *"Sic, imperator, oculi exstillescant mei,* | *si uidi aut tetigi."* ["he immediately spits into his left hand and scatters the spittle with his fingers: 'So may my eyes ooze away, general, just like this, if I have either seen or touched your property.'"], 9–12). Since Phaedrus had proudly claimed that his work was emulative and innovative in its content too (and not only in its poetic form: see 1 *prol*. 1–2 Z. [= G.]), calling his fables *Aesopias, non Aesopi* [...] *quia paucas ille ostendit, ego plures sero,* | *usus uetusto genere sed rebus nouis* ("Aesopic rather than Aesop's, since he brought out only a few, and I compose a larger number, using the old form but treating new themes", 4 *prol*. 11–13 Z. [= G.]), it is clear that the *res nouae* also include the fable of the soldier and Pompey, and more generally the tendency to amplify the Aesopic zoomorphic material with anecdotal and novelistic motifs, a tendency that makes the interaction with the novel more pointed.[36] In the case just mentioned, what is striking is the common presence of low-class tricksters who are described as *cinaedi*, of beasts of burden carrying precious goods, and of thefts denied with snide, sacrilegious excuses, or false, vulgar oaths: all this contrasts to the established order represented by the armed villagers or by the *dux* Pompey the Great.[37] Phaedrus' *cinaedus* soldier then manages to redeem himself thanks to an incredible proof of courage; in fact, the purpose of Phaedrus' story differs from that of Apuleius, who reproduces in full the negative stereotype of the *cinaedus* found chiefly in the satiric and epigrammatic tradition.[38]

35 This is how the oath is described at the end of the fable (33).

36 The best-known example is certainly the story of the widow and the soldier (*app*. 13 Z. [= *app*. 15 G.]), on which see n. 48. In the case of the goblet stolen and then hidden, the cross-over between novel and Aesopic tradition is further strengthened by the presence of the same motif in the *Vita Aesopi* (127–128 G, where the theft is the fruit of a deceit at Aesop's expense): see Zimmerman 2007 for a comparison between this version, that of the *Onos* (41), and of Apuleius.

37 Cf. Grottanelli 1983, 127–128, who offers an anthropological reading of this tale and its protagonist, with reference to the mythical and religious background (see esp. 121–139). On this fable in general, see Luzzatto 1976, 151–160; Oberg 2000, 236–238; Henderson 2001, 137–148; on the technique of the "paradoxical portrait", see La Penna 1978, 206–208.

38 The moral of Phaedrus' tale is found in Perotti's title *Quam difficile sit hominem nosse*, which leads us back to the theme of the opposition between appearance and truth. On the different

Returning to the most evident feature that connects the story of the man changed into an ass with the Aesopic tradition of animals as allegories of human types, we have seen that Lucius maintains both human sensibility and intelligence though in the guise of an ass, but not the faculty of speech that is the distinctive feature of animals in the fable genre, as the prologues of the poetic collections of Phaedrus (1 *prol.* 6 Z. [= G.]) and Babrius (1 *prol.* 5–11) underscore.[39] The aphasia of the novel's protagonist, who tries more than once to speak in a desperate attempt to express his dissent or indignation but to his great frustration succeeds only in braying,[40] is an interesting divergence from the recurring figure of the ass in Aesop's fables, who has — as is the rule — a double voice, both animal and human.[41] In particular, the unpleasant sound of the ass's braying, which above all the Apuleian Lucius dwells on disconsolately,[42] turns into a reason for presumption on the part of the ass that hunts with the lion. In Phaedrus' version (1.11 Z. [= G.]) the ass is proud of his unusual, powerful voice (*insueta uoce* […] *clamorem subito totis tollit uiribus* ["with his unfamiliar voice […] he immediately begins to bray with all his might"], 5–7), which terrifies and puts to flight the animals that are then captured by the lion. The ass reacts as follows and is heaped with ridicule: *Tunc ille insolens:* | *"Qualis uidetur opera tibi uocis meae?"* | *"Insignis" inquit "sic ut, nisi nossem tuum* | *animum genusque, simili fugissem metu."* ("Then the insolent creature said: 'What do you think of my vocal performance?' 'It was superb,' said

characterization of the *cinaedus* in Phaedrus compared to the widespread negative stereotype, see Mattiacci 2022b.

39 See also the epistle *ad Tiberinum filium* which opens the collection of the *Romulus*: *Aesopus* […] *ut uitam hominum et mores ostenderet, inducit aues, arbores, bestias et pecora loquentes* ("Aesop […], to show the life and manners of men, introduces talking birds, trees, beasts, and cattle"; Th.). On speaking animals, see the recent volume edited by Schmalzgruber 2020, with interesting contributions also on the ancient fable.

40 The loss of speech is certainly one of the most serious impairments for the protagonist become beast with a human intelligence. The aphasia of Lucius-the-Ass is immediately highlighted after his metamorphosis (*Met*. 3.25.1; *Onos* 13), and more than once repeated in the course of his life as an ass (*Met*. 3.29.2–3; 7.3.3–4; 7.25.8; 7.26.2; 8.29.5; *Onos* 16; 38): cf. Finkelpearl 2006, 213–218; Slater 2020. On the problems posed by Lucius' prayer to the moon goddess (in *Met*. 11.2 the interior monologue of the ass is presented as an act of praying aloud), cf. GCA 2015, 105; Slater 2020, 306–307. In the fairytale world of Cupid and Psyche, to the contrary, animals speak human language (cf. the analysis of Slater 2020, 293–299).

41 Cf. the *Index* of Perry 1965, s.v. "Ass" and "Donkey". For the ass who converses not only with other animal characters, but also with humans, cf. e.g. Phaed. 1.15 Z. [= G.] (on which see below § 4); 4.5 Z. [= 5.4 G.].

42 Cf. n. 40, where we see the special insistence on Lucius' aphasia and braying in the Apuleian reworking of the *Eselsroman*.

the lion, 'so much so that, if I hadn't known your nature and your race, I should have fled in terror like the others.'", 12–15).[43] On the other hand, his long donkey ears represent Lucius' only consolation for his grievous deformity, precisely because, *auribus grandissimis praeditus*, he is able to hear everything easily even at a distance (and so to collect stories).[44] But in the Aesopic world these ears are the object of derision and harm: in the fable cited above, Phaedrus coins for the *insolens asellus* the diminutive *auritulus* (1.11.6 Z. [= G.]), an absolute *hapax*, evidently with parodic effect;[45] and in Avianus' version of the fable of the donkey in the lion's skin[46] a farmer recognizes, thanks to *magna* […] *ab aure* (13), the *asellus* who pretends to be a wild beast and imitates a roar (*imitato murmure*, 17), terrifying only those who fail to recognize him.

The physical and auditory features of the ass are, thus, treated differently in the *Eselsroman* than in the Aesopic tradition. Yet, where Phaedrus draws upon *res nouae* to enlarge the *uetustum genus* of the fable, and the figure of the ass is presented in a novelistic context alongside human characters, many elements are close to Apuleius, not least the motif of braying. And this is the case for an interesting fable in the *Appendix* that we examine in the following section.

3 The ass and the girl

The main characters of this story are two youths, one rich and one poor, and a beautiful maiden promised by her family to the rich suitor, but who marries the poor one thanks to the unexpected help of Venus and of a donkey, who is an unconscious instrument of the goddess. Here below I give the text, whose moral can be understood from Perrotti's title *Fortunam interdum praeter spem atque expectationem hominibus fauere* ("Fortune sometimes favours men beyond their hope"):

43 On this fable and the Romanization effected by Phaedrus compared to Aesop's version (Aesop. 151 P. [= 156 Hsr.; 209 Ch.]), cf. Gärtner 2015, 149–154; cf. also Pisi 1977, 33–38; Solimano 2005, 154–155; Renda 2012, 110–111.

44 Cf. *Met*. 9.15.6. For the role the large ears play in the status of Lucius-the-Ass as a witness and to reinforce the motif of his *curiositas*, cf. GCA 1995, 150.

45 The diminutives *asellus* and *auritulus* (perhaps an echo of Hor. *Sat*. 1.9.20: *demitto auriculas, ut iniquae mentis asellus* ["I down drop my poor ears like a sulky donkey"], but cf. also Ov. *Am*. 2.7.15: *auritus* […] *asellus*) are obviously ironic, alluding to the real nature of the ass beyond its voice and its terrifying effects: see Gärtner 2015, 151.

46 Avian. 5, which extensively reworks the Greek version present in Aesop. 188 P. [= 199 Hsr.; 268 Ch.] and 358 P. [= 280 Ch.]; Babr. 139.

Vnam expetebant uirginem iuuenes duo.
Vicit locuples genus et formam pauperis.
Vt nuptiarum dictus aduenit dies,
amans, dolorem quia non poterat perpeti,
maerens propinquos contulit se in hortulos,
quos ultra paulo uilla splendens diuitis
erat acceptura uirginem e matris sinu,
parum ampla in urbe uisa quod fuerat domus.
Pompa explicatur, turba concurrit frequens,
et coniugalem praebet Hymenaeus facem.
Asellus autem, qui solebat pauperi
quaestum <re>ferre, stabat portae in limine.
Illum puellae casu conducunt sui,
uiae labores teneros ne laedant pedes.
Repente caelum, Veneris misericordia,
uentis mouetur, intonat mundi fragor
noctemque densis horridam nimbis parat.
Lux rapitur oculis, et simul uis grandinis
effusa trepidos passim comites dissipat,
sibi quemque cogens petere praesidium fuga.
Asellus notum proximum tectum subit
et uoce magna sese uenisse indicat.
Procurrunt pueri, pulchram aspiciunt uirginem
et admirantur; deinde domino nuntiant.
Inter sodales ille paucos accubans
amorem crebris auocabat poculis.
Vbi nuntiatum est, reciperatus gaudiis,
hortante Baccho et Venere, dulces perficit
aequalitatis inter plausus nuptias.
Quaerunt parentes per praeconem filiam;
nouus maritus coniuge amissa dolet.
Quid esset actum postquam populo innotuit,
omnes fauorem comprobarunt caelitum.
(Phaed. *app*. 14 Z. [= *app*. 16 G.])

Two young men were courting the same girl; the rich suitor carried the day against the birth and good looks of the poor one. When the day appointed for the wedding came, the sorrowing lover, because he could not endure his grief, betook himself to his nearby gardens, beyond which at a short distance the gorgeous villa of the rich suitor stood ready to receive the maiden from her mother's bosom; for the house in the city had not seemed spacious enough for the occasion. The wedding procession gets under way, a large crowd gathers, and Hymen provides the marriage torch. Now an ass which used to bring in some profit for the poor man was standing at the threshold of the city gate. By chance the girl's kinsmen hire it for her use, to save her tender feet from wear and tear on the way. Suddenly, by the compassion of Venus, the sky is stirred by winds, the crash of thunder resounds throughout the heavens and brings on a night made rough by heavy rains. The light of the day is snatched from their sight, and at the same time a storm of hail bursts forth, throwing the wedding guests into

> confusion everywhere, scattering them, and compelling each one to take refuge for himself in flight. The ass enters the familiar shelter close at hand and announces his arrival with a loud bray. The servants run out; the sight of a beautiful girl meets their startled eyes, and presently they report to their master. He, reclining at a table with a few friends, was consoling his disappointed love with cup after cup of wine. When the news was brought to him he made a joyful recovery; and, prompted by Bacchus as well as by Venus, he proceeded to consummate his own sweet nuptials amid the applause of his comrades. The bride's parents advertised for their daughter by the town crier, and the new husband grieved for the loss of the wife that was to be his. When people came to know what had happened everybody hailed with approval the favour shown by the celestial gods.
>
> (Transl. Perry, with some adaptations)

Both the fable's length and its topic already give an idea of its distinctiveness. With its 33 lines, this composition is the third longest in Phaedrus' corpus;[47] in modern editions it follows the equally long tale (31 lines) of the widow and the soldier (*app*. 13 Z. [= *app.* 15 G.]), which shares its novelistic character and which, given the presence of the same story in Petronius' *Satyrica* (111–112), is undoubtedly the most famous example of the intersection between fable and novel.[48] In these two singular fables we find the theme of eros, rare in Phaedrus,[49] first treated according to the misogynistic cliché of female lustfulness and inconstancy, and then from the romantic perspective of the triumph of love blessed by Fortune, which represents a rare positive note in Phaedrus' pessimistic universe.[50]

In this lively tale of two suitors, whose source is unknown, a complicated web of literary and poetic echoes has been found, as well as the influence of declamations, in which the motif of the contrast between the rich and the poor was frequent.[51] Clearly what is interesting for us, more than the general relationship with

47 After 3.10 Z. [= G.] of 60 lines and *app*. 8 Z. [= *app.* 10 G.] of 34 lines, compositions already mentioned for their analogies with the novel genre. To be kept in mind also is that, according to the hypothesis of Zago 2015, 85–89, the unitary poem restored to us by the new manuscript M (*app*. 32 G. + *app*. 8 G. + four new senarii [= *app.* 30 Z.]) must have had more than 33 lines.

48 See Weinreich 1931, 53–73. On the vast reception of this theme and the relations among the various ancient versions, of which the most famous is that of Petronius, I limit myself to a reference to only the most recent contributions: Huber 1990; Vannini 2013 (with previous bibliography).

49 The few other examples are 2.2 Z. [= G.] and *app*. 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.].

50 For an interpretation of Phaedrus as "la voce amara della favola esopica" ("the bitter voice of the Aesopic fable"), cf. La Penna 2021 (1968).

51 More precisely, we could say that upon a declamatory scheme inspired by the *controuersiae* (for other examples cf. Phaed. 3.10 Z. [= G.]; 5.5 Z. [= 4.5 G.]) is grafted a theme taken from Catullus (Catull. 61 for the scene of the wedding procession), from Latin elegy, and from Virgil (in partic. *Aen*. 4.160–165 for the motif of the storm). See esp. the commentary of Luzzatto 1976, 231–237, and the analysis of Craca 2014, who also suggests a 'theatrical' subdivision of the tale into scenes; cf. also Pepe 1991, 69–75; Oberg 2000, 247–250; Solimano 2005, 318–319; for an analysis of the

the novel based on the fundamental role played by Fortune (here identified with Venus), is the specific relationship with the *Metamorphoses*, given the central role of the *asellus* as the instrument of a Fortune not *caeca* but *uidens*, who resolves the contest between the two suitors, as she does the metamorphic plight of Apuleius' Lucius.[52] Already Otto Weinreich had pointed out the analogies between *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] with the tale of Charite,[53] especially with the first part, which ends with a 'happy ending' and is intertwined with the story of the ass stolen by robbers.[54] However, Weinreich did not believe that Apuleius depended directly on Phaedrus' fable; instead, he used the comparison between the two texts to reconstruct a common source which, given the miraculous salvific intervention of the divinity, could be identified as an aretological Hellenistic tale. Leaving aside such complicated issues of *Quellenforschung*, I would like to investigate some points of contact (and of divergence) that seem relevant to our discussion, concerning how both Phaedrus' verse fable and Apuleius' prose narrative are happy to include certain common motifs, for a similar purpose of entertaining a varied public with a plot that weaves together realistic and learned elements.

We have already mentioned the story of Charite that frames the *bella fabella* of Cupid and Psyche: the beauty of the maiden kidnapped by robbers on the day of her wedding strikes the ass protagonist as soon as she enters the novel: *uirginem filo liberalem* […] *puellam mehercules et asino tali concupiscenda* […] *aduehebant* (sc. *latrones*) ("they brought with them a maiden of refined qualities […] a very desirable girl, by Hercules, even to an ass like me", *Met*. 4.23.3). And just as good-looking, as is suitable in a love novel in miniature, is her betrothed: *speciosus adulescens*, as the maiden herself calls him in telling her sad story to the robbers' old servant (*Met*. 4.26.3). In Phaedrus, too, beauty marks the couple destined to a final union (cf. *formam pauperis*, 2; *pulchram* […] *uirginem*, 23); and in his fable we also find the motif of the interrupted wedding, with a description of the house all aglow for the celebration and of the mother alongside the bride (*uilla*

female figure, cf. De Maria 1987, 120–128. For the reconstruction of the source of *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] and the reception of similar motifs in Medieval and Humanist literature, cf. Thiele 1908, 369–372; Weinreich 1931, 9–33; Henderson 1977, who is, however, sceptical about the dependence on Phaedrus of modern versions identified by the previous scholars.

52 Thus, rightly, Solimano 2005, 318; cf. *Met*. 11.15.2–3, where the priest of Isis announces to Lucius that, after the torments of *Fortuna caeca* and *nefaria*, he has finally passed under the protection of *Fortuna uidens*.

53 Weinreich 1931 (cit. n. 51), esp. 15–30.

54 On the structure of the tale in two parts with differing endings (the first happy, in the manner of the Greek love novel, the second tragic, due to the presence of a jealous rival who kills the husband), cf. Nicolini 2000, 11–73.

splendens […] *uirginem e matris sinu*, 6–7: cf. *domus* […] *taedis lucida constrepebat hymenaeum; tunc me gremio suo mater* […] *mundo nuptiali decenter ornabat* ["our whole house […] alight with torches was blaring out the wedding hymn; at that time my mother was holding me in her lap and prettily decorating me with wedding finery"], *Met*. 4.26.5–6).[55] In the novel the interruption of the wedding dramatically separates the lovers, Charite and Tlepolemus, who will, however, be joined in the end thanks to the courageous enterprise of the betrothed, who frees the maiden from the robbers. By contrast, in the fable Venus-Fortune providentially steals the maiden from the aspirations of the rich suitor and delivers her to the *dulces nuptiae* with the *pauper amans*. In both cases, however, the wedding scene is repeated (cf. 6–10, 28–29; *Met*. 4.26; 7.14) and ends with the striking image of the *uirgo asino triumphans* amidst a jubilant crowd, whose joy the ass shares by his potent braying. Let us compare Phaedrus' lines 21–24 with the scene of Charite's return home on the back of the ass:

> **Procurrunt** parentes, affines, clientes, alumni, famuli laeti faciem, gaudio delibuti. Pompam cerneres omnis sexus et omnis aetatis nouumque et hercules memorandum spectamen, uirginem asino triumphantem. Denique ipse etiam hilarior pro uirili parte, ne praesenti negotio ut alienus discreparem, porrectis auribus proflatisque naribus **rudiui fortiter, immo tonanti clamore personui**.
>
> (Apul. *Met*. 7.13.1–3)[56]

> Their parents, relatives, clients, wards, and servants came running to meet us, their happy faces suffused with joy. You could see a parade of each sex and age, and, by Hercules, a novel and memorable spectacle: a virgin riding in triumph on an ass. Even I was as happy as a man could be, and had no desire to be out of tune with the present proceedings like an outsider; and so I stretched out my ears, flared my nostrils and brayed my best — I should say trumpeted with thunderous din.
>
> (Transl. Hanson)

The image of the crowd rushing also recalls *pompa explicatur, turba concurrit frequens* (9); but it is above all the ass's braying (*uoce magna*, 22), dwelt on by Apuleius in realistic detail, which shows the complex interaction between the two authors. Distinguishing himself from the Aesopic tradition of humanized animals to develop a novelistic motif in which the ass is merely a beast endowed only with

55 All the details mentioned up to now (the maiden's beauty and that of her fiancé, the interrupted wedding) are absent in the *Onos*.

56 The description of the maiden's return home on the back of the ass is much more concise in the Greek version, and the detail of the braying, though present, is reduced to an announcement of the "good news" at a distance (*Onos* 26). Not relevant here is the relationship of Apuleius' text to the tradition of the apocryphal gospels, on which see Shanzer 1990.

its natural voice (and not one both human and animal, as we saw above), Phaedrus makes this figure converge with that of the *Eselsroman's* ass-man who cannot speak and whose braying, for once, is not a cause of frustration but is willingly given as sign of jubilation. On the other hand, Phaedrus' donkey, which obeys pure instinct, contrasts with that of Apuleius, who does not fail to emphasize his human essence, ironically revealing his heartfelt happiness (*hilarior pro* ***uirili*** *parte*)[57] and his wish to manifest it, in order not to seem out of place (*ut alienus*) amidst the general joy. Also profoundly different is the figure of the *uirgo*: while she is a silent, passive character in Phaedrus, who develops the narration exclusively from the male point of view, Apuleius' Charite is far more active; indeed, even if we only consider the first part of the tale, we see her showing presence of mind and courage in her attempt to escape with the ass from the robbers' lair (*Met*. 6.27–29).[58]

There are two additional elements, not observed up to now, which might link Phaedrus' *asellus* to Apuleius' text. The animal had been leased by the family to carry the bride during the *deductio* from the town to the country villa of the wealthy man, so that the rough road does not hurt the girl's tender feet (14). Concern that the beloved should not wound her tender feet is an elegiac motif,[59] here brought into the nuptial context and set in relation to the humble, prosaic figure of the ass. Lucius, too, will be involved with the lovely little feet of the maid he carries on his back: during the attempt at flight mentioned above, between the two there seems to develop an almost erotic bond: the ass, not insensible — as we have seen — to Charite's beauty, often turned his neck, pretending to scratch his back, and sweetly kissed *pedes decoros puellae* (*Met*. 6.28.2).[60]

Finally, Phaedrus' *asellus*, an animal symbolic par excellence of poverty,[61] is presented as a natural ally of the poor man who could gain some profit from his

57 On the irony of this expression (= "for my individual part"), taken from law and become current usage, but referred here to an ass and not to a *uir*, cf. Vallette 1945, 17 n. 2; GCA 1981, 166.

58 As has been said, it is chiefly this part of the tale that interests us for the comparison with Phaedrus, while in the second, tragic part (cf. n. 54) Charite will be changed into a true virago, killing herself on a sword after blinding the perfidious rival guilty of Tlepolemus' death (*Met*. 8.8–14).

59 Cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.48–49: *a, te ne frigora* ***laedant!*** | *a, tibi ne* ***teneras*** *glacies secet aspera plantas!* ("ah, may the frost not harm you! ah, may the jagged ice not cut your tender feet!": verses that Virgil — according to Servius — had probably taken from Cornelius Gallus, cf. Cucchiarelli 2012, 501–502); Prop. 1.8.7–8: *tu* ***pedibus teneris*** *positas fulcire pruinas,* | *tu potes insolitas, Cynthia, ferre niues?* ("can you tread with your dainty feet the hoar-frost on the ground? can you endure, Cynthia, the unfamiliar snows?").

60 This and the other details connected to the erotic sphere (*placidis gannitibus*, *Met*. 6.27.6; *delicatas uoculas*, 6.28.1: cf. Nicolini 2000, 187–188) are totally absent in the *Onos*.

61 Cf. Keller 1909, 265–266.

services (*quaestum referre*, 12), perhaps by using him to carry home or to market the products of his modest *hortuli* (5). The couple of an ass and a poor man who lives off the meagre proceeds of his vegetable plot is also found in Apuleius, in the episode in which Lucius' owner is a *pauperculus hortolanus*. The gardener himself says of the poor animal, his only helpmate, to an arrogant soldier who wants to commandeer him: *hic ipse* […] ***asellus*** […] *paucos holerum maniculos de proximo* ***hortulo*** *solet anhelitu languido fatigatus subuehere* ("this poor ass […] can scarcely even carry a few handfuls of vegetables from my garden nearby without getting tired and out of breath", *Met*. 9.39.7). The diminutives *asellus* and *hortulus* appear elsewhere in the two authors, but only in *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] and in this passage of the *Metamorphoses* are they associated with each other, with the clear aim of emphasizing the lowly condition of both man and animal.[62]

4 Conclusions

A fable in the Aesopic corpus (179 P. [= 190 Hsr.; 274 Ch.]) presents an ass that eats very little and works very hard in the service of a gardener; the situation, which is only touched on, is similar to that of Lucius-the-Ass, who suffers cold and hunger in the episode we referred to above (cf. esp. *Met*. 9.32; *Onos* 43). But this fable is of interest chiefly for its development: the dissatisfied ass obtains from Zeus the opportunity to change owner (gardener, potter, tanner) several times, with the result that its situation worsens each time. According to Alexander Scobie, what we see here is a sort of *Eselsroman* in miniature, which may have suggested to its author the idea of tying together various stories about the ass.[63] This hypothesis is not altogether convincing: after all, Lucius' life with his owners after the gardener (two brother cooks and ultimately their wealthy owner) does not get worse; on the contrary, it gets notably better from a material point of view, allowing him to regain human habits. Still, Scobie's observation leads us to the reflection that, at the intertextual level, the animal fable has a privileged relationship, among literary genres and ancient novels in general, with the story of Lucius, whose metamorphosis into an ass for most of the story subjects him to a fate of hunger, beatings, and unbearable labours, just as often happens to the donkeys of fable.[64]

62 The gardener's poverty is also made clear in the corresponding passage of the *Onos* (43–45); for the pair Ass-Gardener in an Aesopic fable, see below.

63 Scobie 1975, 30.

64 Along with the examples already cited, see e.g. also Babr. 7 and Aesop. 181 P. [= 192 Hsr.; 142f Ch.] (the donkey who dies of fatigue because the horse/mule does not want to share its burden); 263 P.

Recently, Ellen Finkelpearl has opportunely illustrated how, besides offering narrative suggestions for the plot of the *Metamorphoses*, animal fables interact with the ambiguous hybridity of Lucius in his animal state: "Lucius is complicatedly both human and animal and not simply a man in animal skin; bodies matter and are not divisible from the mind." Apuleius therefore activates the complex nature of Aesopic animals by setting them alongside Lucius' ambiguous identity, and profoundly changing the fables into a longer narrative in which the moral or allegorical element has been removed.[65]

In light of these results, which were chiefly based on the comparison of Apuleius' novel with the Greek animal fable, the present study has tried to conduct a more limited comparison with Phaedrus, whose literary project was undoubtedly ambitious: not only to endow the low genre of the fable with artistic dignity through a learned verse rewriting of the rough Aesopic material, but also to broaden its boundaries and renew its contents (*res nouae*) through the introduction of anecdotal and novelistic material.[66]

It is precisely thanks to this literary awareness and thematic *uarietas* that Phaedrus' version of the Aesopic genre lends itself to interesting intertextual parallels with the *Metamorphoses* and the great variety of its interwoven *fabulae*. First of all, the two Latin authors share a commitment to rewrite a Greek original for a public of Roman language and culture, and both engage in a meaningful metaliterary dialogue with the reader. For this reason, we began from the similarities between the programmatic discourses with which, in a self-ironizing manner, both Phaedrus and Apuleius present to the reader their humble and entertaining *fabulae* (which, however, conceal a deeper meaning), and we then examined a series of thematic and linguistic convergences between their works. The elements we have pointed out are not meant to demonstrate Apuleius' direct dependence on Phaedrus — a hypothesis not impossible but certainly weak, both due to the presence of some of these elements in the *Onos*, thus making them attributable to the lost Greek model of the *Metamorphoses*, and due to the scarce reception of Phaedrus, whose work was disseminated mainly through anonymous prose paraphrases.[67] Rather, the elements of convergence between these two au-

[= 204 Hsr.; 273 Ch.] (the donkey who carries the same weight as the mule, but receives half the ration of food); Babr. 111 and Aesop. 180 P. [= 191 Hsr.; 266 Ch.] (the donkey with the burden of salt).

65 Finkelpearl 2018, esp. 269, source of the quotation referring to the comparison between *Met*. 4.4 and Babr. 7 (264–267); see also Slater 2020, 292–293.

66 For an example of Greek narrative fable with echoes in Apuleius, cf. Babr. 116, which tells of a 'menage à trois' to compare to the story of the miller, the adulterous wife, and her young lover (*Met*. 9.27); on this, see van Djik 1996, 518; Finkelpearl 2018, 273–276 (with bibliography).

67 Cf. Mattiacci 2021.

thors constitute a significant testimony, in the Latin context, of osmosis between fable and novel, both traditionally low and popular genres that are here learnedly re-interpreted for a varied audience, and both with the common intent of offering quality entertainment under the emblem of the *spoudogeloion*. Obviously, certain motifs present in the Aesopic tradition and particularly in Phaedrus, once introduced into the narrative structure of the novel, are amplified and modified to suit the new context, and lack — we repeat — the moral meaning that constitutes the distinctive element of the fable.

Another important difference on which our analysis has dwelt is between the talking animals of the Aesopic world and the ass of the novel, who cannot speak though he retains his human intelligence. On this, I would add one last thought, which leads us to consider the relationship between Phaedrus and Apuleius once again. In the *Metamorphoses* the association of the ass-protagonist with the figure of the slave is especially evident, and his inability to speak is also put into high relief. According to Keith Bradley, the state in which Lucius finds himself after the metamorphosis reveals an identity crisis and offers "a perfect metaphor for the situation of captive slaves, who, while not losing their voices in quite the same manner as Lucius, certainly lost the ability to speak openly and freely"; further on he adds, "He is not the ass of Phaedrus's fable who can voice the wisdom of the suffering servant."[68] The reference is to a fable with no parallel in the Aesopic corpus, where an *asellus* responds as follows to his old master, who has urged him to flee because enemies are arriving:

> At ille lentus: "Quaeso, num binas mihi
> clitellas impositurum uictorem putas?"
> Senex negauit. "Ergo quid refert mea
> cui seruiam, clitellas dum portem unicas?"
> (Phaed. 1.15.7–10 Z. [= G.])

> But the stubborn beast replied: "I ask you, are you assuming that the conqueror will load me with two packs at a time?" "No," said the old man. "Then," said the ass, "what difference does it make to me whose slave I am, so long as I carry only one pack at time?"
> (Transl. Perry)

The philosophy of the donkey, who accepts but also denounces the impossibility of any social change for the poor, reveals the bitter moral drawn by the slave subjected to power (*seruitus obnoxia*) who, according to Phaedrus, created the fable

68 Bradley 2012, 64, 66.

using a coded language to express what he wished to but dared not say outright.[69] Thus, animals and slaves are central to both Phaedrus' fable and Apuleius' novel: if the speechlessness of Lucius-the-Ass becomes a metaphor for the slave who loses his capacity to speak openly, according to Phaedrus it is precisely this incapacity that the fable is responding to by exploiting the mask of talking animals to give voice to slaves.

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69 Phaed. 3 *prol.* 33–37 Z. [= G.] *Nunc, fabularum cur sit inuentum genus,* | *breui docebo. Seruitus obnoxia,* | *quia quae uolebat non audebat dicere,* | *affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit* | *calumniamque fictis elusit logis* ("Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure with made up stories").

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Part VI: **Fable and Epigram**

Lukas Spielhofer

Of Lions and Eunuchs: The Fables of Babrius between Epic and Epigram

Abstract: Many fables (ancient and modern) invite readers to assume a rather stereotypical scheme in both their formal structure and their content. Yet the stunning variety of fables — at least in ancient collections — almost contradicts the need for a 'model' that is often proposed by modern fable theory. With examples from Babrius' *Mythiambi*, this paper illuminates the discrepancy between the set of literary expectations as generic markers of fable literature on the one hand, and the actual material in the fable collections of the Imperial period on the other. Babrius' fables, containing no promythia and rendering most of their epimythia superfluous, offer ample evidence for their structural 'non-typicality'; further, some poems actively allude to and provoke comparisons with other genres such as epic or epigrammatic poetry — subverting an audience's generic expectations. To analyse this feature and its significance for the interpretation of the *Mythiambi*, I focus on fables that stand out from the rest of the collection for their length: Babr. 95, the longest extant fable from antiquity; and a number of short tetrastichs, Babr. 40, 54, and 73. An analysis and comparison of these fables will illustrate the extent to which their structure and content is influenced by ancient epic and epigram; this prompts a reflection on what this means for the question of genre in fable scholarship as a whole.

1 Introduction

The question of what constitutes a 'typical' fable is difficult to answer.[1] From a modern perspective, one might imagine a short narrative story acted out by humanoid speaking animals that aims to convey a certain point of view, sometimes but not always with a moral expressed at its beginning, end, or both beginning and end. The narrative may be condensed to the absolutely essential elements of the story or be generously expanded, while dialogue is often present in direct or indirect speech.[2]

My warmest thanks go out to all the colleagues who participated in the discussion of this paper at our conference and from whose valuable suggestions the final product greatly profited.

1 On this question, cf. also the introduction to this volume.

2 For an attempt at structural schematization, cf. e.g. Dithmar 1997, 190–196. However, as Gärtner 2015, 47–48, has shown in the case of Phaedrus, ancient fables defy an all too strict categorization.

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Ancient literary criticism, however, had a much broader view of fables, which were sometimes only described very generally as fictitious stories that illustrate truth or reality, as Aelius Theon defines them in his *Progymnasmata*.[3] A broad understanding of the term 'fable' in antiquity is also suggested by the fact that a variety of different types survive in various forms in the extant fable collections of the Imperial period. As I aim to show in this paper, the evident narrative complexity of Greek and Roman fable literature prompts us to somewhat re-assess our modern understanding of the term and the generic expectations that come with it. To illustrate why such a re-evaluation can be fruitful, I will discuss examples from Babrius' *Mythiambi*, a collection of Greek verse fables written presumably in the 2nd or 3rd century CE by an author of whom we know almost nothing but his name. Assumptions about his biography, nationality, and sphere of influence are based largely on information derived from the fables themselves with no significant external evidence, and remain mostly speculation.[4]

Some of Babrius' poems defy a clear categorization and seem to call into question what a 'typical' fable even consists of. While the *Mythiambi* share common characteristics with the fables of Phaedrus, Avianus, and the texts of the *collectio Augustana* on a macrolevel, there are examples in the collection that illustrate how much the individual works differ from one another. In line with the theme of this volume and using Babrian examples, I want to reflect on the coherence and boundaries of ancient fable literature and shed light on the ways in which it can absorb and morph into other genres.

At first glance, the fables analysed in this paper seem not to conform fully to what we would expect of a fable: Babr. 95, on the one hand, is the longest known fable from antiquity; on the other, Babr. 40, 54, and 73 are part of a group of short four-line poems, so-called tetrastichs (*tetrasticha*). None of these poems have comparable examples in other, earlier fable collections; they may well be original creations.[5] In the larger context of the collection, their length is significant. In the

3 Theon *Prog*. 72 Spengel: Μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν ("A fable is a fictitious story that illustrates [a] truth/reality").

4 On Babrius' date and biography, cf. Holzberg 2012, 57–66; 2019, 9–13; Grethlein 2022; Spielhofer 2023, 12–18. Among the most recent contributions to the study of Babrius are Pertsinidis 2022, Allgaier 2022, Spielhofer 2022 and 2023, Althoff 2023, and Bottini's contribution in this volume. An overview of past and current scholarship is given in Spielhofer 2023, 23–27; cf. also Holzberg 2018 for a current bibliography.

5 Babr. 95 may have parallels with an iambic poem of Archilochus (cf. *fr*. 188–199 Lasserre), the authenticity of which is contested, however; parts of it are transmitted in a supposed Byzantine paraphrasis of Archilochus by Constantinus Rhodius (cf. Lasserre 1958, 58–59), other editors such as West do not include it in their editions. Interesting to mention are also possible parallels to

fragmentary state in which they survive, the *Mythiambi* consist of 144 fables in choliambic metre prefaced by two prologues;[6] the majority of the compositions are of between 10 and 20 lines in length; there are occasional longer poems, though — with one notable exception — they do not exceed 30 lines. In light of this, both the much larger Babr. 95 and the brief tetrastichs stand out. I argue that these fables reflect a playful literary exchange with other genres — more specifically, with epic and epigrammatic poetry — and that, by adapting elements and narrative devices characteristic of these types of texts, they subvert their audience's generic expectations of fable.[7]

2 The lion's feast: Babrius and epic

As with many issues in the field of classical literature, there is no straightforward answer to the question of how to define epic poetry. Most ancient texts deemed 'epic' today, starting from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, can be described as longer narrative poems written in hexameters.[8] Stylistically, they share a formulaic, 'high' style of language, make use of epithets, similes, comparisons, catalogues, and descriptions, and have a high proportion of direct speech. With regard to content, epic poems — at least those of the mythological, heroic, and historical type — deal with subjects removed from everyday life, such as myths, the deeds of kings and noble men, or historical events. These subjects often revolve around a central epic hero and are organized by a set of typical scenes.[9] Further, their stories are told by

Mesopotamian Wisdom literature: The Babylonian *Series* (or *Tale*) *of the Fox*, a longer narrative work or 'disputation poem', revolves around the fox's adventures and interactions with other animals such as the wolf, the dog, or the lion. However, the exact plot of this text is difficult to ascertain due to the highly fragmentary status of transmission, with less than a tenth of the original poem preserved; thus, these connections, though not impossible given Babrius' familiarity with the Near Eastern tradition of animal fable, remain tenuous; cf. Jiménez 2017, 4–5; 377; see also Sövegjártó 2021.

6 If we add the paraphrases of some lost fables in the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, a collection of prose retellings found in a 15th-century codex which appear to be largely based on Babrius' text, we may assume the complete work to have contained around 200 fables, though this is somewhat speculative: for this approach, cf. Holzberg 2019, 10–11; Spielhofer 2023, 18–20.

7 On the different conceptions of genre and their methodological implications, I refer to the introduction to this volume.

8 For a modern definition, cf. Toohey 1992; for Roman epic, cf. von Albrecht 1994, 64–75.

9 On the study of structural elements of epic poetry, cf. Reitz/Finkmann 2019.

an objective, all-knowing narrator, following an organic structure of narration with a beginning, a middle, and an end.[10]

Bearing these generic categories of epic in mind, one might ask whether and in what way Babrius approximates this type of poetry in his fables.[11] As regards content, we find several examples in the *Mythiambi* that deal with mythological subjects and gods in their epic, anthropomorphic form: Babr. 12 is a sequel to the myth of Procne, Tereus, and Philomela, in which the sisters, now turned into birds, meet again in the wilderness;[12] Babr. 68 deals with an archery contest between Zeus and Apollo with Hermes and Ares as bystanders; finally, Babr. 31 depicts the battle of the weasels and mice, a variation on the epic parody of the *Batrachomyomachia*, the Battle of the Frogs and Mice.[13] Moreover, some characters in the fables are described or speak in a way that seems to hark back to epic speech and characterization, e.g. the lion in Babr. 1 who challenges his human opponent to battle using formulaic expressions that may evoke Homeric combat scenes.[14]

Besides these more general observations, however, there is a fable in the collection that specifically seems to draw upon characteristics of ancient epic: Babr. 95.[15] For illustrative purposes, I print the text of the poem in its entirety:

Λέων νοσήσας ἐν φάραγγι πετραίῃ
ἔκειτο νωθρὰ γυῖα γῆς ἐφαπλώσας,
φίλην δ' ἀλώπεκ' εἶχεν ᾗ προσωμίλει.
ταύτῃ ποτ' εἶπεν "εἰ θέλεις με σὺ ζώειν—
πεινῶ γὰρ ἐλάφου τῆς ὑπ' ἀγρίαις πεύκαις
κεῖνον τὸν ὑλήεντα δρυμὸν οἰκούσης,
καὶ νῦν διώκειν ἔλαφον οὐκέτ' ἰσχύω—
σὺ δ' ἢν θελήσῃς, χεῖρας εἰς ἐμὰς ἥξει
λόγοισι θηρευθεῖσα σοῖς μελιγλώσσοις."
ἀπῆλθε κερδώ, τὴν δ' ὑπ' ἀγρίαις ὕλαις

10 Cf. Latacz 1998, 11–13.

11 On the 'epic' fable in Babrius more generally, cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 316–328.

12 Cf. a famous version of this story in Ov. *Met*. 6.412–674; for a study of this fable, cf. Spielhofer 2023, 231–247.

13 Coincidentally or not, Babr. 31 is also one of the few longer fables in the collection surpassing 20 lines; cf. also Holzberg 2019, 31. Other comparable epic subjects and characters appear in Babr. 59 (Zeus, Poseidon, Athena), 18 (Helios, Boreas), 70 (Polemos, Hybris), or 72 (Iris). In this context, the parallels of some of Babrius' epic fables to other examples of ancient 'animal epic' like the *Batrachomyomachia* or comparable poems known from Greek papyri offer rich ground for further investigation; however, such a study lies beyond the scope of this paper.

14 For an interpretation of this fable, cf. Spielhofer 2023, 123–134; cf. also Gärtner 2022, 67–68.

15 For an interpretation of this fable, cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 320–326.

σκιρτῶσαν εὗρε μαλθακῆς ὑπὲρ ποίης.
προσέκυσε δ' αὐτὴν πρῶτον, εἶτα καὶ χαίρειν
προσεῖπε, χρηστῶν τ' ἄγγελος λόγων ἥκειν.
"ὁ λέων" ἔφασκεν, "οἶδας, ἔστι μοι γείτων,
ἔχει δὲ φαύλως, κἀγγύς ἐστι τοῦ θνῄσκειν.
τίς οὖν μετ' αὐτὸν θηρίων τυραννήσει
διεσκοπεῖτο· σῦς μέν ἐστιν ἀγνώμων,
ἄρκτος δὲ νωθής, πάρδαλις δὲ θυμώδης,
τίγρις δ' ἀλαζὼν καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἐρημαίη.
ἔλαφον τυραννεῖν ἀξιωτάτην κρίνει·
γαύρη μὲν εἶδος, πολλὰ δ' εἰς ἔτη ζώει,
κέρας δὲ φοβερὸν πᾶσιν ἑρπετοῖς φύει,
δένδροις ὅμοιον, κοὐχ ὁποῖα τῶν ταύρων.
τί σοι λέγω τὰ πολλά; πλὴν ἐκυρώθης,
μέλλεις τ' ἀνάσσειν θηρίων ὀρειφοίτων.
τότ' οὖν γένοιτο τῆς ἀλώπεκος μνήμη,
δέσποινα, τῆς σοι τοῦτο πρῶτον εἰπούσης.
ταῦτ' ἦλθον. ἀλλὰ χαῖρε, φιλτάτη. σπεύδω
πρὸς τὸν λέοντα, μὴ πάλιν με ζητήσῃ–
χρῆται γὰρ ἡμῖν εἰς ἅπαντα συμβούλοις–
δοκῶ δὲ καὶ σέ, τέκνον, εἴ τι τῆς γραίης
κεφαλῆς ἀκούεις· ἔπρεπέ σοι παρεδρεύειν
ἐλθοῦσαν αὐτῷ καὶ πονοῦντα θαρσύνειν.
τὰ μικρὰ πείθει τοὺς ἐν ἐσχάταις ὥραις,
ψυχαὶ δ' ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι τῶν τελευτώντων."
ὡς εἶπε κερδώ. τῆς δ' ὁ νοῦς ἐχαυνώθη
λόγοισι ποιητοῖσιν, ἦλθε δ' εἰς κοίλην
σπήλυγγα θηρός, καὶ τὸ μέλλον οὐκ ᾔδει.
λέων δ' ἀπ' εὐνῆς ἀσκόπως ἐφορμήσας
ὄνυξιν οὔατ' ἐσπάραξεν ἀκραίοις,
σπουδῇ διωχθείς· τὴν δὲ φύζα δειλαίην
θύρης κατιθὺς ἦγεν εἰς μέσας ὕλας.
κερδὼ δὲ χεῖρας ἐπεκρότησεν ἀλλήλαις,
ἐπεὶ πόνος μάταιος ἐξανηλώθη.
κἀκεῖνος ἐστέναξε τὸ στόμα βρύχων
ὁμοῦ γὰρ αὐτὸν λιμὸς εἶχε καὶ λύπη,
πάλιν δὲ κερδὼ καθικέτευε φωνήσας
ἄλλον τιν' εὑρεῖν δεύτερον δόλον θήρης.
ἡ δ' εἶπε κινήσασα βυσσόθεν γνώμην·
"χαλεπὸν κελεύεις. ἀλλ' ὅμως ὑπουργήσω."
καὶ δὴ κατ' ἴχνος ὡς σοφὴ κύων ᾔει,
πλέκουσα τέχνας καὶ πανουργίας πάσας,
ἀεὶ δ' ἕκαστον ποιμένων ἐπηρώτα
μή πού τις ἔλαφος ᾑματωμένη φεύγει.
τὴν δ' ὥς τις εἶδε, δεικνύων ἂν ὡδήγει,
ἕως ποθ' εὗρεν ἐν κατασκίῳ χώρῳ
δρόμων ἀναψύχουσαν. ἡ δ' Ἀναιδείης

ὀφρὺν ἔχουσα καὶ μέτωπον εἰστήκει.
ἐλάφου δὲ φρὶξ ἐπέσχε νῶτα καὶ κνήμας,
χολὴ δ’ ἐπέζει καρδίην, ἔφη δ’ οὕτως·
[σὺ νῦν διώκεις πανταχοῦ με καὶ φεύγω.]
“ἀλλ’ ὦ στύγημα, νῦν μὲν οὐχὶ χαιρήσεις,
ἤν μοι προσέλθῃς καὶ γρύσαι τι τολμήσῃς.
ἄλλους ἀλωπέκιζε τοὺς ἀπειρήτους,
ἄλλους δὲ βασιλεῖς αἱρέτιζε καὶ ποίει.”
τῆς δ’ οὐκ ἐτρέφθη θυμός, ἀλλ’ ὑποβλήδην
“οὕτως ἀγεννής” φησί “καὶ φόβου πλήρης
πέφυκας; οὕτω τοὺς φίλους ὑποπτεύεις;
ὁ μὲν λέων σοι συμφέροντα βουλεύων,
μέλλων τ’ ἐγείρειν τῆς πάροιθε νωθείης
ἔψαυσεν ὠτός, ὡς πατὴρ ἀποθνῄσκων·
ἔμελλε γάρ σοι πᾶσαν ἐντολὴν δώσειν,
ἀρχὴν τοσαύτην πῶς λαβοῦσα τηρήσεις.
σὺ δ’ οὐχ ὑπέστης κνίσμα χειρὸς ἀρρώστου,
βίῃ δ’ ἀποσπασθεῖσα μᾶλλον ἐτρώθης.
καὶ νῦν ἐκεῖνος πλεῖον ἢ σὺ θυμοῦται,
λίην ἄπιστον πειράσας σε καὶ κούφην,
βασιλῆ δέ φησι τὸν λύκον καταστήσειν.
οἴμοι πονηροῦ δεσπότου. τί ποιήσω;
ἅπασιν ἡμῖν αἰτίη κακῶν γίνῃ.
ἀλλ’ ἐλθέ, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἴσθι γενναίη,
μηδ’ ἐπτόησο πρόβατον οἷον ἐκ ποίμνης.
ὄμνυμι γάρ σοι φύλλα πάντα καὶ κρήνας,
οὕτω γένοιτο σοὶ μόνῃ με δουλεύειν,
ὡς οὐδὲν ὁ λέων ἐχθρός, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ εὐνοίης
τίθησι πάντων κυρίην σε τῶν ζῴων.”
τοιαῦτα κωτίλλουσα τὴν ἀχαιίνην
ἔπεισεν ἐλθεῖν δὶς τὸν αὐτὸν εἰς ᾅδην.
ἐπεὶ δὲ λόχμης εἰς μυχὸν κατεκλείσθη,
λέων μὲν αὐτὸς εἶχε δαῖτα πανθοίνην,
σάρκας λαφύσσων, μυελὸν ὀστέων πίνων,
καὶ σπλάγχνα δάπτων· ἡ δ’ ἀγωγὸς εἰστήκει
πεινῶσα θήρης, καρδίην δὲ νεβρείην
λάπτει, πεσοῦσαν ἁρπάσασα λαθραίως,
καὶ τοῦτο κέρδος εἶχεν ὧν ἐκεκμήκει.
λέων δ’ ἕκαστον ἐγκάτων ἀριθμήσας
μόνην ἀπ’ ἄλλων καρδίην ἐπεζήτει,
καὶ πᾶσαν εὐνήν, πάντα δ’ οἶκον ἠρεύνα.
κερδὼ δ’ ἀπαιολῶσα τῆς ἀληθείης,
“οὐκ εἶχε πάντως” φησί “μὴ μάτην ζήτει.
ποίην δ’ ἔμελλε καρδίην ἔχειν, ἥτις
ἐκ δευτέρου λέοντος ἦλθεν εἰς οἴκους;”

(Babr. 95)

A sick lion lay in a rocky cave, his sluggish limbs stretched out on the earth. He had a fox as a friend with whom he conversed. One day he said to her: “If you want me to survive — [5] for I am hungry for that deer who lives in the woody thicket there underneath wild pines, and now I have no longer the strength to chase a deer — but if you want, she will come into my hands, caught by your honey-tongued words.” [10] The crafty one went away and found that one in the wild woods jumping over soft grass. And at first she welcomed her respectfully, then she also addressed her with a greeting, and said that she came as a messenger of good words. “The lion,” she said, “you know, is my neighbour. [15] He is ill and close to death. So he has been considering who will rule the animals after him: the boar is senseless, the bear sluggish, the leopard hot-tempered, the tiger boastful and altogether solitary. [20] He judges that the deer is worthiest to rule: she has a splendid appearance, but lives for many years; she grows horns that are fearsome to all creeping animals, similar to trees, not like those of bulls. What need I say more? Save that you have been confirmed, [25] you are destined to rule over the animals who roam the mountain. But, then, may there be memory of the fox, my Lady, who first told you this. That is why I came. But now farewell, dearest one; I hurry back to the lion, lest he looks for me again, [30] since he needs me as adviser in all things. And I think you too should hurry, my child, if you would listen to an old head in any way: it would be appropriate for you to go, sit beside him, and cheer him up in his suffering; little things win over those in their last hours, [35] and the souls of the dying are in their eyes.” So spoke the crafty one. And this one’s mind was puffed up by feigned words. She came to the hollow cave of the beast, and did not know what was going to happen. The lion attacked her heedlessly from the bed [40] and slashed her ears with the tips of his claws, driven by haste. A panic put the wretched one to flight from the door straight into the middle of the woods. The fox threw her hands together, since her labour had been spent in vain. [45] And the other one groaned and gnashed his teeth (for hunger and grief gripped him at the same time), and again he begged the crafty one, saying that she should devise another, second hunting scheme. Setting her mind in motion from deep within, she said: [50] “You request something difficult. But I will be at your service nonetheless.” And then she followed the track like a shrewd hound, devising tricks and villainies of every kind, and she always asked every shepherd if a bleeding deer was on the run anywhere. [55] When someone had seen her, he showed and guided her, until she found her at last in a shady place, recovering from the race. Having the brow and face of shamelessness, she stood there. A shudder seized her back and legs [60] and bile boiled over in her heart; she spoke thus: “[Now you follow me everywhere and I flee.] Oh you abomination, now you will not rejoice if you come near me and dare to mutter anything. Play the fox with others who are inexperienced, [65] choose others and make them kings.” Yet her mind was not changed, but she interrupted her and said: “Are you so ignoble and full of fear? Are you so suspicious of your friends? The lion wanted to give you useful counsel, [70] he was about to rouse you from your former sluggishness when he touched your ear like a dying father: for he was about to give you every kind of command, how you can take over and preserve such a large empire. However, you did not even withstand the scratch of his feeble hand, [75] but with force you tore yourself away and were wounded all the more. And now he is angrier than you, having found you all too untrustworthy and careless, and he says that he will install the wolf as king. Ah, what a wicked master! What shall I do? [80] To us all you are the cause for these evils. But go and henceforward be brave, do not be scared like a sheep from the flock. For I swear to you by all the leaves and springs, as it shall come to pass that I serve you alone, [85] that the lion is no enemy at all, but that, out of goodwill, he will make you mistress of all

> animals." Cajoling with such words she convinced the two-year-old deer to go to the same underworld twice. After he had shut himself up in the innermost part of the lair, [90] the lion had to himself a splendid banquet — gulping down the flesh, slurping the marrow from the bones, and devouring the inner parts. The guide stood by, starving for the prey; but she lapped up the deer's heart, having seized it stealthily when it fell down, [95] and this she had as profit for which she had worked hard. The lion, having gone through each of the inner parts, missed only the heart amid them all, and he searched for it in his whole bed and in his whole house. And the crafty one, confounding the truth, said: [100] "She did not have one, no doubt, do not search in vain. What kind of heart should she have who came a second time to the house of a lion?"
>
> (Transl. L.S.)

This fable revolves around a sick lion, the king of animals, who is no longer able to hunt and relies on his friend, the fox, to persuade his prey, the deer, to come to him. It can be divided into the following sections:

- 1–3: introduction
- 4–42: the first attempt
  - 4b–9: the lion's first *actio* (direct speech addressed to the fox)
  - 10–13: the fox's *reactio* — she meets the deer in the woods as a messenger
  - 14–35: the fox's first *actio* (direct speech addressed to the deer)
  - 36–42: the deer's *reactio*: the lion attacks, the deer escapes
- 43–88: the second attempt
  - 43–48: *reactio* to the escape and the lion's second *actio* (indirect speech addressed to the fox)
  - 49–58: the fox's *reactio* (in direct speech) — she looks for the deer in the woods and meets her again
  - 59–65: the deer's *reactio* and first (direct) speech addressed to the fox
  - 66–86: the fox's second *actio* (direct speech addressed to the deer)
  - 87–88: the deer's *reactio*: the lion attacks a second time and kills the deer
- 89–102: result
  - 89–92a: the lion feasts on the deer
  - 92b–95: the fox eats the deer's heart
  - 96–98: the lion looks for the heart
  - 99–102: the fox's concluding speech

In the structure of this poem, while the modern, more-or-less generic scheme of *introduction — plot divided into series of actions and reactions (with or without*

speeches) — result seems to apply to this fable,[16] it is vastly more complex than comparable poems: after a short introduction, the plot is divided into two main parts of roughly equal length that detail the two attempts to lure the deer into the lion's den and are based on an *actio-reactio* structure, with some variation especially in the second part. The following long epilogue, which extends into a series of events as its own mini-narrative, is notably uncharacteristic for this scheme, especially due to its lack of dialogue, save for the fox's final speech.

Many things could be said about this fascinating poem, which warrants a separate, detailed study of its own.[17] For the sake of brevity, I will just point out some key aspects relevant to the discussion of genre: as mentioned, with its 102 lines, Babr. 95 is more than three times longer than any other fable in the collection. Thus, it has rightly been given the title of a "fable-epyllion"[18] or "epic fable"[19] in previous scholarship. Of course, this text is not an epic poem, and many of its characteristics clearly suggest a link to the fable tradition, not least the fact that it is not hexametric but choliambic poetry. And yet, some of its features seem strangely non-fabulistic, first and foremost its length: even though the story told in Babr. 95 is comparable to other fables — the collection includes several examples of a single narrative with multiple scenes —, the slower pace of narration, with descriptions and substantial amounts of direct and indirect speech, is noteworthy.[20] This rhetorical elaboration is in line with Babrian poetics[21] and contributes to the expansion of the fable to epic proportions.[22]

The fox serves as the central character of this fable and joins the different episodes together into a coherent story.[23] The smaller sub-sections are characterized by frequent scene changes, which are otherwise not very common in Babrius: we visit the lion's lair twice; the fox's and deer's dialogues take place in several locations, and so on. Further, the larger number of characters than usual is notable:

16 Cf. Dithmar 1996, 190–196; Gärtner 2015, 47–48.

17 Of course, in the context of this contribution my analysis of such an extensive text can only be a criminally short and selective one.

18 Holzberg 2012, 64; 2019, 37; Nøjgaard 1967, 316–328.

19 Nøjgaard 1967, 205: "fable épique".

20 Around 55% of the text consists of speeches, which can comprise dozens of lines at a time; cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 321.

21 The pronounced rhetorical dimension of Babrius' fables can be seen as an expression of aesthetic ideals in the context of the Second Sophistic; cf. Spielhofer 2023, 30–32, 75–76; Pertsinidis 2022.

22 Cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 322.

23 As Nøjgaard 1967, 316, 322, remarks, the organization of the story around a main character is a key characteristic of what he calls "la fable épique".

besides the lion and the deer, the fox also interacts with some anonymous shepherds. One could, therefore, argue that Babr. 95 is generally more 'epic' in the sense that it tells a story as a more complex sequence of actions and scenes and describes its narrated world in more detail than other fables, which often seem to be quite spare in description.[24]

Considering the characteristics of mythological/heroic/historical epic outlined above, we can already discern parallels in this fable that one might call 'epic': an organic, linear narration, a central character that structures the narrative, detailed descriptions of the narrated world, and a focus on speech and dialogue. Adding to this are content-related parallels: the story deals, at least in the deceptive reality of the fox's speeches, with a royal line of succession, a dynastic topic removed from most recipients' everyday life.[25]

When we go into further detail, however, many more parallels with epic poetry appear, reflected in style and language, subject matter, and storytelling. The following examples demonstrate how Babr. 95 plays on variations of epic scenes, comparative similes, and formulaic expressions that have equivalents in the Homeric tradition, in order to evoke echoes of ancient epic. This is especially salient in the fable's many speeches, as our first example illustrates:

> **ὣς εἶπε κερδώ**. τῆς δ' ὁ νοῦς ἐχαυνώθη
> **λόγοισι ποιητοῖσιν**, ἦλθε δ' εἰς κοίλην
> σπήλυγγα θηρός, καὶ τὸ μέλλον οὐκ ἤδει.
> (Babr. 95.36–38)

24 Cf. in this context also Nøjgaard 1967, 317, who speaks of an "étendue épique" as "la représentation d'une action 'longue', c.-à.-d. d'une intrigue comportant un certain nombre d'étapes temporelles et d'une certaine complexité" ("the representation of a 'long' action, that is, a fabulistic plot comprising a certain number of temporal phases and of a certain complexity") in comparison to shorter fable narratives. He goes on to define an episodic sequence of actions, spatial descriptions, the creation of a social milieu, and a dialogic structure as constitutive of such an epic-fabulistic mode of narration, and names Babr. 95 as a typical example of this type of storytelling.

25 The poem's apparent nature as a tale of kings and great men is alluded to and echoed by expressions throughout such as τυραννήσει (16), τυραννεῖν (20), ἀνάσσειν (25), δέσποινα (27), βασιλεῖς (65), ἀρχὴν (73), βασιλῆ (78), δεσπότου (79), or κυρίην (86). Very interesting in this context is the role of the female gender of the deer (ἡ ἔλαφος) as highlighted by δέσποινα and κυρίην, considering that the deer in other fables (e.g. Babr. 43 and 46) is male (ὁ ἔλαφος). This may hint at a certain gender dimension in this fable and also throws a different light on the ambiguous gender of the fox — which I have cautiously interpreted as female in my translation; however, since the fox argues for the deer's royal claim on the ground of antlers, a feature that one would typically only expect in males, it is unclear how far this argument is supported by factual knowledge of the animal world.

> So spoke the crafty one (= the fox). And this one's (= the deer's) mind was puffed up by feigned words. She came to the hollow cave of the beast (= the lion), and did not know what was going to happen.

This passage is from the end of the fox's first speech to the deer. The expression ὡς εἶπε κερδώ (36), with κερδώ, "the crafty one", as a fabulistic epithet or synonym for the fox, in closing the speech evokes typical formulaic expressions that introduce or conclude epic dialogues.[26] The deer's reaction may also be reminiscent of the way emotions are expressed in Homeric epic, especially with the Ionic dative λόγοισι ποιητοῖσι (37), which only appears in a handful of fables, reinforcing the impression that we should be thinking of an epic scene here.[27]

Following the fox's advice, the deer enters the lion's cave, is attacked, and barely makes it out alive. In her flight, she is characterized as overcome with φύζα (41), an expression that is used in Homeric epic to describe a flight due to panic or cowardice.[28] Following from this, if we consider the role of the deer in epic more generally, we find that the animal frequently symbolizes (cowardly) fear in a negative, proverbial sense, e.g. in epic comparisons or similes.[29] Against this background, the characterization of Babrius' fleeing deer is striking, since it appears to provoke generic expectations of ancient epic and thereby positions the whole fable and its characters as a play on the literary tropes of this genre, almost like an expanded Homeric simile-comparison (or a sequence of them); other examples of this technique of generic absorption are also found in the rest of the poem, as we will see.

The next 'epic' passage in this fable follows immediately after the deer escapes the lion's first attack and describes his reaction:

> κἀκεῖνος ἐστέναξε τὸ στόμα βρύχων
> ὁμοῦ γὰρ αὐτὸν **λιμὸς εἶχε καὶ λύπη**,
> πάλιν δὲ κερδὼ **καθικέτευε** φωνήσας
> ἄλλον τιν' εὑρεῖν δεύτερον δόλον θήρης.
> **ἡ δ' εἶπε κινήσασα βυσσόθεν γνώμην**·
> "χαλεπὸν κελεύεις. ἀλλ' ὅμως ὑπουργήσω."
> καὶ δὴ **κατ' ἴχνος ὡς σοφὴ κύων** ᾔει,

26 The expression ὡς (ἔ)φάτο or ὣς εἰπών is common in Homer, cf. e.g. *Il.* 1.33; 1.43; 1.68; 1.101; 1.188; 1.245; 1.326; 1.345; 1.357; 1.446; 1.457; 1.511; 1.568; 1.595.

27 Cf. Luzzatto 1975, 28.

28 Such as in *Il.* 15.62; *Od.* 14.269; cf. LSJ s.v. φύζα.

29 Cf. *Il.* 1.225: οἰνοβαρές, κυνὸς ὄμματ' ἔχων, κραδίην δ' ἐλάφοιο ("You who are heavy with wine, who have the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer"); 13.101–102: οἳ [...] φυζακινῆς ἐλάφοισιν ἐοίκεσαν ("<the Trojans> who resemble shy, fleeing deer").

πλέκουσα τέχνας καὶ πανουργίας πάσας,
ἀεὶ δ' ἕκαστον ποιμένων ἐπηρώτα
μή πού τις ἔλαφος ᾑματωμένη φεύγει.
(Babr. 95.45–54)

And the other one groaned and gnashed his teeth (for hunger and grief gripped him at the same time), and again he begged the crafty one, saying that she should devise another, second hunting scheme. Setting her mind in motion from deep within, she said: "You request something difficult. But I will be at your service nonetheless." And then she followed the track like a shrewd hound, devising tricks and villainies of every kind, and she always asked every shepherd if a bleeding deer was on the run anywhere.

(Transl. L.S.)

As Luzzatto has observed, the use of εἶχε in λιμὸς εἶχε καὶ λύπη (46) as "hunger and grief gripped him" is very similar to how emotions are described in the Homeric poems as something that overwhelms a person.[30] The verb καθικέτευε in the following line in the imperfect tense without an augment is typical of Homeric language but only appears three times in Babrius.[31] The fox's short answer to the lion's new request is introduced by another expression in 49 that could be read as formulaic, especially as κινήσας is often used as the first word of such introductory lines in Homeric epic.[32] In the subsequent passage, the fox chases after the deer; in 51 and 52, she is described as devising all kinds of tricks and, in her pursuit, likened to a clever hunting dog following the deer's tracks. Correspondingly, in ancient epic, we find a wealth of similes that compare characters in pursuit of someone with hunting dogs, e.g. in the *Iliad*.[33] This short comparison is the first in a series of epic-fabulistic similes in Babr. 95 and has parallels in the rest of the collection.[34] Together with the linguistic quality of the following κατ' ἴχνος […] ᾖει (51), which can be interpreted as a Homeric tmesis, the comparative element gives the scene some epic flavour, while the animal imagery connects the epic with the fabulistic world.

Directly following this we find the depiction of the fox meeting the deer for a second time and the deer's reaction to this encounter:

30 Cf. Luzzatto 1975, 28.

31 Cf. Rutherford 1883, 91; Luzzatto 1975, 29.

32 *Il.* 17.442 and *Od.* 5.285: κινήσας δὲ κάρη προτὶ ὃν μυθήσατο θυμόν ("He moved his head and spoke in his anger"); *Od.* 15.45: λὰξ ποδὶ κινήσας, καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν ("He touched him with the foot and said the word to him").

33 Cf. *Il.* 8.338–341; 15.579; 22.188–190; cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 325.

34 Cf. e.g. Babr. 1, which can also be interpreted as an epic simile.

ἡ δ’ **Ἀναιδείης**
ὀφρὺν ἔχουσα καὶ μέτωπον εἱστήκει.
ἐλάφου δὲ **φρὶξ ἐπέσχε νῶτα καὶ κνήμας**,
χολὴ δ’ ἐπέζει καρδίην, ἔφη δ’ οὕτως· 60
(Babr. 95.57b–60)

Having the brow and face of shamelessness, she stood there. A shudder seized her back and legs and bile boiled over in her heart; she spoke thus:

(Transl. L.S.)

Again, this passage brims with epic vocabulary: starting from 57, the fox is described as having the brow and face of shamelessness. This is reminiscent of several Homeric descriptions of gods, for example Zeus and Hera, with dark brows used as an epithet or a representation of their emotions, especially in formulaic expressions which introduce or conclude speeches.[35] The reaction of the deer in 59 and 60 is noteworthy for its epic tone: while the rare poetic φρίξ, here used to denote the shudder that comes over the deer upon seeing the fox, seems to be of Homeric origin,[36] ἐπέσχε points towards the Homeric idea of overwhelming emotions already mentioned in the preceding example in 46;[37] finally, the combination of νῶτα καὶ κνήμας may also evoke Homeric epic.[38] Against this background, then, the description of the deer’s emotions and the introduction of her speech in a similar formulaic manner may strike us as equally emphatic: χολὴ δ’ ἐπέζει καρδίην (60) has the deer’s raging bile metaphorically boiling over from her heart — note again the focus on καρδίη here. And while a reader might expect this too to be derived from epic imagery, one may be surprised to find that similar expressions are actually found in Old Comedy;[39] the insertion of a comedic expression into an otherwise rather epic scene could be interpreted as an author playing with his audience’s expectations.[40]

35 Cf. *Il.* 1.528; 15.102–103; 17.209.

36 It is used in Homer to describe the ripples on a water surface caused by the wind: *Il.* 7.63; 23.692; *Od.* 4.402.

37 Cf. also ἐπέσχε in an abstract sense to indicate that something conquers or extends outwards in *Il.* 23.238; 24.792.

38 The juxtaposition of κνήμη with other body parts is frequent in Homer: cf. e.g. *Il.* 4.146–147: μηροὶ | […] κνῆμαί τε; 17.386: γούνατά τε κνῆμαί τε πόδες; *Od.* 8.135: μηρούς τε κνήμας τε; however, the combination νῶτα καὶ κνήμας is not attested before Babrius.

39 Cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 468: οὐ θαυμάσιόν ἐστ’, οὐδ’ ἐπιζεῖν τὴν χολήν. (“it is not surprising, nor that your bile boils over.”).

40 For the relationship between fable and comedy, cf. the contributions of Pütz and Gärtner in this volume.

In the following speech (61–65), the deer rebukes the fox and suggests she look for other rulers elsewhere, since she wants nothing to do with the lion and his machinations. In her response, the fox successfully gaslights the deer, excuses the lion's behaviour, and persuades her victim to return to the den a second time. Her speech begins as follows:

> **τῆς δ' οὐκ ἐτρέφθη θυμός, ἀλλ' ὑποβλήδην**
> "οὕτως ἀγεννής" φησί "καὶ **φόβου πλήρης**
> **πέφυκας**; οὕτω τοὺς φίλους ὑποπτεύεις;
> (Babr. 95.66–68)
>
> Yet her mind was not changed, but she interrupted her and said: "Are you so ignoble and full of fear? Are you so suspicious of your friends?
>
> (Transl. L.S.)

Besides the highly epically-coded θυμός, 66 contains another typical introductory clausula: in Homeric epic, ὑποβλήδην in combination with a verb denoting speech marks a change of speaker by way of interruption or answer, as in a passage in the *Iliad* where Achilles interrupts Agamemnon.[41] This gives the fox's following speech (67–86) a confident, almost hostile tone, which fits its content well: in the first few lines, the fox attempts to manipulate the deer into thinking that she herself acted wrongly against those who would wish her well. Here, we also find a case of Babrian *intra*textuality. The fox remarks: "Are you so full of fear?" (φόβου πλήρης | πέφυκας, 67–68). This collocation, which appears several times in the *Mythiambi*,[42] takes up an identical expression from Babr. 1 mentioned earlier, a fable in which wild animals flee from the mountain as a hunter arrives and only a brave lion dares to face him; through allusions to Homeric epic, their exchange is similarly staged as an epic battle scene.[43] The verbal connection between these two epically-flavoured fables, both of which strongly feature a lion as a central character, can, in my view, hardly be a coincidence.

In the rest of her speech, the fox attempts to depict the lion as a caring old friend — to rouse pity she even compares him to a dying father (71); in contrast, the deer is impetuous and short-sighted. The fox bids her not to be afraid and,

41 *Il.* 1.292: Τὸν δ' ἄρ' ὑποβλήδην ἠμείβετο δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς ("The divine Achilles interrupted him and answered").

42 Cf. Spielhofer 2023, 49.

43 Cf. Babr. 1.3; for an interpretation of this fable, cf. Spielhofer 2023, 123–134.

employing another short comparison-simile, likens her to a sheep in his flock (82),[44] before ending with an epic oath:

ὄμνυμι γάρ σοι φύλλα πάντα καὶ κρήνας,
οὕτω γένοιτο σοὶ μόνῃ με δουλεύειν,
ὡς οὐδὲν ὁ λέων ἐχθρός, ἀλλ' ὑπ' εὐνοίης
τίθησι πάντων κυρίην σε τῶν ζῴων."
(Babr. 95.83–86)

For I swear to you by all the leaves and springs, as it shall come to pass that I serve you alone, that the lion is no enemy at all, but that, out of goodwill, he will make you mistress of all animals."

(Transl. L.S.)

Instead of the typical deities, the fox swears by leaves and springs; similar oaths that evoke natural elements can be found in Homeric epic where they are also marked with the verb ὄμνυμι;[45] besides epic parallels, the natural characterization of the scene also seems quite fitting for the world of fable. The fox's speech is quickly followed by an authorial comment: τοιαῦτα κωτίλλουσα τὴν ἀχαίνην | ἔπεισεν (87–88a), which further mirrors formulaic introductory and closing clausulae of epic poetry.

Beyond these frequent, more-or-less systematic allusions to elements of Homeric poetry, the final sequence of Babr. 95 is our most important illustration of how this fable plays with the literary conventions of ancient epic: after the deer has entered the lion's den a second time — dramatically described as ᾅδην (88), the literal underworld — the lion, described as king of all animals throughout the poem, traps and feasts on her:

λέων μὲν **αὐτὸς εἶχε δαῖτα πανθοίνην**,
σάρκας λαφύσσων, μυελὸν ὀστέων πίνων,
καὶ σπλάγχνα δάπτων·
(Babr. 95.90–92a)

the lion had to himself a splendid banquet — gulping down the flesh, slurping the marrow from the bones, and devouring the inner parts:

(Transl. L.S.)

44 This epic element makes use of the character traits typically associated with certain animals in fables (e.g. the timid sheep), creating an image that is at the same time epic and fabulistic.
45 Cf. e.g. *Il.* 14.271; 15.40; 23.585.

His meal is described as a δαῖς πανθοίνη (90), a splendid banquet with all sorts of meals.[46] In the context of epic, this may evoke various typical banquet scenes; but, in a fabulistic manner, the motif is turned on its head here — instead of feasting *with* his 'guest', the lion feasts *on* her.[47] 91 and 92 then further detail his meal: he gulps down the deer's flesh, slurps the marrow from her bones, and devours her inner parts. This passage contains multiple links to epic: the expression σάρκας λαφύσσων (91) is found twice in the *Iliad*, both times in similes that compare Agamemnon's and Menelaos' fighting to that of lions who kill cattle;[48] another comparable passage is found in the *Odyssey*,[49] where Polyphemus kills Odysseus' companions and, while feasting on them, is compared to a mountain lion, with the enumerated body parts identical to those present at the lion's banquet, namely innards, flesh, and bones with their marrow. Babrius' depiction has substantial parallels to these Homeric similes: the intertextual links make Babrius' lion himself appear like an epic simile in motion, acting out exactly the scenes that they usually accompany in Homer, all while combining both the animal's role of killing prey and the human's (or cyclops') role of feasting in a banquet. Taken together with the other examples discussed above, this passage is a strong indication that Babr. 95 does, in fact, play with epic conventions and, in addition to other examples that illustrate what an 'epic' fable might look like,[50] attests to the many forms that fable poetry can take.

Finally, the fox symbolically eating the deer's heart (92–95) and the lion looking everywhere for it (96–98) prompts a pointed remark spoken by our main character:

> **κερδὼ** δ' ἀπαιολῶσα τῆς ἀληθείης,
> "οὐκ εἶχε πάντως" φησί "μὴ μάτην ζήτει.
> ποίην δ' ἔμελλε **καρδίην** ἔχειν, ἥτις
> ἐκ δευτέρου λέοντος ἦλθεν εἰς οἴκους;"
> (Babr. 95.99–102)
>
> And the crafty one, confounding the truth, said: "She did not have one, no doubt, do not search in vain. What kind of heart should she have who came a second time to the house of a lion?"
> (Transl. L.S.)

46 For the significance of the Homeric δαῖς in epic poetry, cf. also McKeon's contribution in this volume.

47 Cf. also αὐτὸς in 90 denoting that he feasts alone.

48 Cf. *Il.* 11.176; 17.64; Luzzatto 1975, 22.

49 Cf. *Od.* 9.292–293.

50 Cf. e.g. Babr. 1; 12; 31; while Babr. 31 extensively treats the trope of the epic battle, Babr. 95 seems to focus more on the epic dialogues and banquet scenes characteristic of the genre.

With the fox's final speech, the fable returns to an almost epigrammatically unexpected ending that leaves room for interpretation. The enigmatic words have multiple implications for the interpretation of this poem: they play on the idea that the heart was seen as the seat of reason in antiquity,[51] suggesting the deer's lack thereof. Beyond that, however, her answer also alludes to the deer's role as a symbol of cowardice in ancient epic, as discussed above, with parallels in the *Iliad* that specifically mention the proverbial καρδίη ἐλάφοιο.[52] It is also notable that we cannot really deduce a *fabula docet* from the fox's words: what should we learn here? That someone who makes the same mistake twice has no common sense? The text neither expresses this explicitly nor gives any other moral instruction; instead, its focus seems to be on telling a captivating story based on common epic tropes — both human and non-human — that is so compelling that by the end we as readers may have even forgotten that we are not, in fact, reading an epic but a fable; the clever fox (κερδώ, 99), perhaps the most typical fable character of all, reminds us of this and highlights even further the contrast between the pseudo-epic storyline and the witty fabulistic frame; finally, the "crafty one's" actions, who stealthily devours the deer's proverbial heart, may also be read as a metapoetic comment on the process of literary appropriation, exemplifying the author's technique of generic absorption and representing a fable that 'eats' epic raw materials to turn them into something new.

I make one final — though very cautious — remark regarding 'epic' characterization in this poem: the fact that 'the crafty one' (κερδώ, 99) gets the heart as profit (κέρδος, 95) in the end could also hint at Odysseus and his role in both the *Odyssey* and *Iliad,* especially since our fable's storyline is also about the creation of a new ruler, with the end result that the new king is precisely the old one. If we go down this route and are willing to equate the fox with Odysseus, we may wish to explore further hints towards other epic heroes in the poem and ask what influence such an equation could have on a reader's image of the different fable characters. Following this interpretation, we might equate the lion king with Agamemnon and the deer with Achilles, seeing as Odysseus was also part of the embassy to Achilles in book 9 of the *Iliad*, which might be mirrored in the lion's double embassy with the fox as messenger. Since the deer is characterized in

51 The metonymic use of καρδία ("heart") to denote the mind appears frequently in epic poetry, e.g. *Il.* 21.441; *Od.* 4.572; 5.389; cf. LSJ s.v. καρδία I 3.

52 See n. 29.

similar terms to Achilles in some of Babrius' other fables,[53] this interpretation, though not without its faults, opens up paths to an additional epic reading.

As can be seen from these examples, Babr. 95 stands out from the rest of the collection not only for its epic length but also for its subject matter, narrative pace, multiple-scene structure, long dialogues, use of epic language, and playful variations on typical epic motifs. As such, it can, in my view, reasonably be understood as a learned author's take on what an epic poem on events unfolding in the world of Aesopic fable might look like.[54]

3 The eunuch's prophecy: Babrius and epigram

While the idea of reading Babr. 95 as a fable in epic form is compelling, it is not the only example in the *Mythiambi* of fables that engage with the conventions of other genres.[55] And what better way to explore the variety of fabulistic storytelling than by examining a narrative form that is the polar opposite of epic, at least from a quantitative point of view: epigrammatic poetry.

Epigrams, such as survive from Hellenistic and Imperial times, can be defined as short poems, in elegiac couplets or other metres, derived from the practice of writing stone inscriptions for a variety of occasions, which emancipated themselves from their original medium and developed into an independent literary form and so could be grouped together into books and collections as works of art in their own right.[56] Among other topics, epigrams deal with sympotic, erotic, and bucolic subjects; they display a fascination for the 'primitive' or 'popular', the unusual, surprising, and even bizarre. In essence, epigrams are short expressions of poetic wit with a pointed ending and may include anecdotes, aphorisms, or

53 Cf. e.g. Babr. 43.10, where she is described as "nimble-footed" (ἴχνεσιν κούφοις), similarly to the "swift-footed Achilles" (πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς, e.g. in *Il.* 1.58; 1.84; 1.48; 1.215; 1.364; 1.489).

54 As already mentioned, the story is unique to the Babrian collection in the ancient tradition; however, it was quite influential in the Medieval and Byzantine period, as various adaptations in French (Marie de France's *Ysopet* 70 [*De leone aegrotante*]), Greek (*Paraphrasis Bodleiana* 200), and especially Latin (e.g. Baldo's *Novus Aesopus* 13; Johannes de Capua 6.68; Nicolas Bozon 6; Raimundus de Biterris 8.61) attest; for a full list, cf. van Dijk 2015 s.v. 51 (136–137).

55 This chapter can only give a brief and selective overview of the generic interactions with ancient epigram. A thorough study of the interconnected relationship between Babrius' fables and epigrammatic poetry is still a desideratum. On epigrammatic elements in Avianus, cf. Neger's contribution in this volume; on epigrammatic retellings of Babrius in the Byzantine period, cf. Scognamiglio's contribution in this volume.

56 On ancient epigram collections in general, cf. Höschele 2010.

satirical elements.[57] From the early Imperial period onwards, epigrams mocking historical persons or more general types in the iambic tradition also become popular. An epigram's structure is often described as comprising two parts: the first creates attention and expectation while the second either meets or, more often, confounds the expectation with a surprising twist revealed at the end.[58]

These definitions offer useful criteria to assess whether the *Mythiambi* share characteristics with the ancient epigram. As with epic, the first and most apparent formal parallel may be the length of the poems: epigrams are characterized by their brevity, many of them not exceeding a handful of lines. Although many Babrian fables are slightly longer than that (between 10 and 20 lines), there are quite a few shorter poems in the collection, the shortest of which are just two lines of text.[59] In metre, one can also draw parallels. The *Mythiambi* are composed in choliambic verse, and epigrammatic poetry too was also written in iambics, a practice that became especially popular in the Imperial period.[60] In content, the *Mythiambi* overlap with epigrammatic poetry in their use of bucolic topics and their tendency to present 'popular' or everyday scenes, as well as bizarre and unusual stories; and conversely, there are also poems in ancient epigram collections which narrate animal fables in the Aesopic tradition.[61] Finally, there are parallels in how both epigrams and fables are arranged into books and collections. In Babrius' manuscript tradition, his fables are arranged in alphabetical order, a feature they share with the fables of the *collectio Augustana* but also with

57 Cf. Degani 1997, 1108–1112. For a list of criteria defining ancient epigram, cf. also Citroni 2019, 39–40; as constitutive of the genre he singles out brevity, the presence of inscriptional features, the elegiac metre, an expressive concentration, a two-part structure, a sense of closure, a connection to an occasion, inclusion within a collection of epigrams, and the author's profession of limited commitment.

58 This can be supported by rhetorical figures of speech such as antitheses, parallelisms, or wordplay; cf. Citroni 2019, 39.

59 This is Babr. 41.

60 Cf. examples in Martial's epigrams, e.g. Mart. 1 *praef.*; 1.10; 1.66; 1.77; 1.84; 1.89; 1.96; 1.113; 2.11; 2.17; 2.57; 2.65; 2.74 etc.; over 70 poems across all twelve books of his collection are composed in iambic metres; for a full list, cf. Norcio 1991, 906.

61 For fabulistic epigrams in the *Anthologia Palatina*, cf. van Dijk 1997, 258–269; Adrados 1999; 2000; Christodoulou 2020; for fables in the epigrams of Gregory of Nazianzus, see also the contribution by Christodoulou in this volume. For studies on the interactions between fables and Roman epigrammatic poetry, particularly Martial, cf. Weinreich 1931; Lobe 2000; Mattiacci 2007; 2008; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2022; Mindt 2013, 260–270; Neger 2012, 264–271; 2022; see also Neger's contribution in this volume.

certain epigram books, such as those of Philippus of Thessalonica or the *Carmina priapea*, which we now know displayed a very similar type of arrangement.[62]

Beyond these general points of contact between the *Mythiambi* and the genre of epigram, however, there is a group of fables within Babrius' collection that deserves further attention if we want to understand this generic relationship: *tetrasticha.* As their name implies, tetrastichs are short poems of four lines; they make up roughly one seventh of the poems in the surviving collection.[63] In scholarship on Babrius, which in the past has largely been focused on textual criticism, their authenticity has often been called into question due to their unusual nature compared to the rest of the fables. Some editors have even eliminated them altogether and expressed harsh judgments on their literary quality.[64] In my view, however, they are not poetic failures but rather expressions of a learned play on the genre of ancient epigram, as the following examples will help to demonstrate:

> **Διέβαινε** ποταμὸν ὀξὺν ὄντα τῷ ῥείθρῳ
> κυρτὴ κάμηλος, εἶτ' ἔχεζε. τοῦ δ' ὄνθου
> φθάνοντος αὐτὴν εἶπεν "ἦ κακῶς πράσσω·
> ἔμπροσθεν ἤδη τἀξόπισθέ μου **βαίνει**."
> (Babr. 40)

> A humped camel was crossing a river with a swift stream, when she eased herself. When the dung overtook her, she said: "Truly, I'm doing badly; already what was behind me is now going in front."
>
> (Transl. L.S.)

This tetrastich depicts a camel crossing a river and watching her own waste surpass her. In the first three lines, the reader is introduced into the scene and witnesses the camel's *actio* as well as a *reactio* involving her dung floating in front of her. In reaction to this, the camel cries out in a typical direct speech that ends the fable and serves as a kind of epimythium. Line 1 opens with the description of the raging current of a river and someone's attempt to cross it — the protagonist is only intro-

62 Cf. Höschele 2017; 2019.

63 Of 144 fables, 19 are tetrastichs: Babr. 8; 14; 29; 39; 40; 41; 54; 60; 73; 80; 81; 83; 90; 96; 109; 110; 113; 121; 133. This type of four-line fable had significant influence in Byzantine literature, cf. Scognamiglio's contribution in this volume.

64 Cf. e.g. Rutherford's verdict on Babr. 8 (1883, 13): "Fabulam vix e Babrio profectam esse judico; si minus recte, utique tamen a Tetrastichista pessime est depravata. Una certe quaerenti manet opinio auctorem camelo suo totum ipsius ingenium deposuisse." ("I judge that this fable hardly came from Babrius; if <I judge> incorrectly, then it was at any rate badly disfigured by a Tetrastichist. Certainly, the only opinion that remains to the inquirer is that the author dumped all his own 'talent' on his camel."); cf. Spielhofer 2023, 190–197.

duced in an enjambment at the beginning of 2, heightening the reader's suspense as to who and what we are witnessing. Immediately after appearing, the camel proceeds to do her business right then and there — in the middle of the river, the line, and the poem itself. One can assume that the intent was for the river to carry away the camel's waste. However, somewhat unexpectedly, the strong current makes it pass in front of the camel and overtake her, as is described in 2 and 3. This now fuels the camel's final speech, in which she describes her sorry state and gives an explanation for it: what 'went' behind is now already in front of her.

When we look at this poem, we see several parallels to an ancient epigram: it is short, it depicts a humorous, even absurd scene with some degree of vulgarity, and closes with a witty, pointed speech, which may be read as a commentary on a mundane event, but can also be interpreted in an abstract, philosophical way. The latter interpretation is also suggested by the (probably interpolated) epimythium,[65] which situates the fable in the context of political theory and invites biographical interpretations about the empirical author's antidemocratic tendencies.[66] This reading shows that small and at first glance trivial poems can have the potential for deep philosophical discourses, as is typical of epigrams. All of this is achieved in a short narrative that appears to stand on its own; the impression of closure that this fable conveys is underlined by a verbal frame highlighting its beginning and end: διέβαινε at the beginning of 1 opens the fable, βαίνει at the end of 4 closes it.[67]

Besides this fable, Babr. 54 is another tetrastich which, in my view, illustrates even more clearly the similarities that some of the fables in the *Mythiambi* share with ancient epigrams:

> **Εὐνοῦχος** ἦλθε πρὸς θύτην ὑπὲρ **παίδων**
> σκεψόμενος. ὁ θύτης δ' ἀγνὸν ἦπαρ ἁπλώσας
> "ὅταν μέν" εἶπε "ταῦτ' ἴδω, **πατὴρ γίνῃ**,
> ὅταν δὲ τὴν σὴν ὄψιν, **οὐδ' ἀνὴρ φαίνῃ**."
> (Babr. 54)

> A eunuch went to a sacrificer to ask him about children. The sacrificer, spreading out a sacred liver, said: "When I look at this, you'll become a father; but when I look at your appearance, you do not seem to be a man."
>
> (Transl. L.S.)

65 πόλις ἄν τις εἴποι τὸν λόγον τὸν Αἰσώπου | ἧς ἔσχατοι κρατοῦσιν ἀντὶ τῶν πρώτων ("a city might tell this fable of Aesop, in which the lowest rule instead of the first ones.").

66 Cf. Holzberg 2012, 67, and Nøjgaard 1967, 312, who speaks of the "moralité politique" ("political morality") of this fable and relates it to the poet's professed role as royal tutor.

67 Cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 240; I thank Vittorio Bottini for pointing this out to me.

Of all the examples discussed, this poem is probably furthest from what we might call a 'typical' fable, not only but especially since it does not have any animals as protagonists.[68] Babr. 54 deals with a eunuch inquiring about becoming a father, to which the sacrificer gives a rather peculiar answer: he hints at the fact that his ritual indicates something contrary to the obvious situation at hand.

This tetrastich displays several elements that could be considered epigrammatic: first, as with the other example, the shortness of four stichic choliambs reflects the brevity typical of the genre; second, the satirical content and everyday scene bring it close to satire or comedy. The poem parodies ritual practice and introduces a character typical of comedy, the eunuch, who is mocked. Eunuchs are also present in two of Martial's epigrams, where the fact that they cannot have children is highlighted:

> Cur tantum **eunuchos** habeat tua Caelia quaeris,
> Pannyche? volt futui Caelia **nec parere**.
> (Mart. 6.67)

> Do you ask why your Caelia has only eunuchs, Pannychus? Caelia wants to be fucked, but not to bear children.
> (Transl. L.S.)

> Omnes **eunuchos** habet Almo nec arrigit ipse:
> et queritur **pariat quod sua Polla nihil**.
> (Mart. 10.91)

> Almo has only eunuchs and he cannot get it up himself; and he complains that his Polla gives birth to nothing.
> (Transl. L.S.)

In a way, we might even imagine one of Caelia's or Polla's eunuchs being the protagonist of Babr. 54 and (paradoxically) wondering why he does not have children, which gives this poem an even more humorous tone.

Besides brevity and content, the epigrammatic nature of this fable is also reflected in its skilfully crafted, symmetrical structure: while the first two lines set the scene for the following conversation and set up an expectation, lines 3 and 4 take this up but pointedly and unexpectedly change the meaning of the poem at the end. Its pun-like character seems to play off the language of visual perception,

68 It has been observed that fables which feature mainly human protagonists exhibit the greatest parallels to epigrammatic poetry; on Phaedrus and Avianus, cf. Neger 2022 and Neger's contribution in this volume; on comparisons between Babrius and Martial, cf. also the literature in n. 61.

with key expressions placed at strategic positions: σκεψόμενος in enjambment at the beginning of 2 highlights the gaze into the future as a way to build up expectation, while acts of looking and appearing play a major role in the second part of the poem: ἴδω (3) and ὄψιν (4) share the same position in their respective lines and φαίνῃ concludes the fable at the end of 4. The sacrificer's answer in direct speech as a sort of epimythium mirrors the well-known epigrammatic structure of anticipation and release: line 3 introduces the first part of the argument with ὅταν μέν at the beginning of the line and πατὴρ γίνῃ at the end, while 4, with a parallel construction (ὅταν δὲ) and even sharing the same predicate ἴδω (3), ends the poem with the fact that the eunuch will not be a father as he is not even a man. The parallel construction of 3 and 4, ὅταν μέν — ὅταν δὲ at the beginning and πατὴρ γίνῃ — ἀνὴρ φαίνῃ at the end, stresses this antithesis even more. If one looks at the beginning of the tetrastich and sees Εὐνοῦχος, one realizes that this ending is clear from the first word onwards and that the whole story is, in fact, absurd. This kind of pointed remark, which makes one re-read and think about the content of a poem, is exactly the kind of ending one would expect from an epigram.

Finally, a third fable from Babrius' collection demonstrates that even without a final direct speech, tetrastichs are examples of concentrated, suspenseful, and pointedly epigrammatic storytelling:

> Ἰκτῖνος **ἄλλην** ὀξέην εἶχε κλαγγήν·
> ἵππου δ' ἀκούσας χρεμετίσαντος **εὐφώνως**,
> μιμούμενος τὸν **ἵππον οὔτε τὴν κρείττω**
> **φωνὴν** θελήσας **ἔσχεν οὔτε τὴν πρώτην**.
> (Babr. 73)

> The kite had a different voice, a high-pitched one. But when he heard a horse neighing euphoniously, he imitated the horse but attained neither the better voice, which he had wanted, nor the earlier one.
>
> (Transl. L.S.)

In all its brevity, this poem offers a variation of the motif of (unsuccessful) imitation frequently found in fable literature.[69] Line 1 brings us into the story: we learn that the kite once had a different voice. The following three lines explain the reason for the change: in 2, the kite first listens to the horse neighing in a beautiful tone; 3 and 4 then describe how the kite imitates the horse's voice. This imitation is reflected on the levels of syntax, prosody, and metre: lines 3b (ἵππον οὔτε τὴν κρείττω) and 4b (ἔσχεν οὔτε τὴν πρώτην) are identical in syntax (parallelism),

69 Cf. e.g. Babr. 137 (jackdaw imitates eagle) or Phaed. 1.24 Z. [= G.] (frog imitates bull).

word length, and stress; they are bound together by the enjambment κρείττω | φωνὴν, making the pointed contrast that concludes the narrative even more apparent. While the emulous kite is not successful in achieving the horse's better voice in 3, this defeat is worsened by the revelation at the very end of 4 that he cannot even recover his original voice, being caught somewhere in between. After a string of actions in the imperfect (1) or non-finite verbal forms (2–3), ἔσχεν in 4 in the aorist breaks the suspense built up in the preceding lines about the outcome of the kite's actions and prepares us for the witty pointe to follow — the kite's absolute failure. As with the other two examples, the narrative concentration and sense of closure typical of epigrams is also present in Babr. 73; this is attested by the accentuation of the beginning and end of the poem, with πρώτην in the final position in 4 referring back to the second word ἄλλην in 1, and the verbal cross-references throughout, such as φωνὴν in the emphatic opening of 4 taking up εὐφώνως in final position in 2.

As the parallels in these examples show, there is good reason to read the Babrian tetrastichs in the context of the ancient epigram; their brevity, characters, and witty pointedness can be understood as an expression of a fable author's playful engagement with the conventions of epigrammatic poetry and an audience's expectations of the same.

4 Conclusion: Questions of genre in the *Mythiambi*

In light of the variety of fables discussed here, what conclusions can we draw about how to define a 'typical' fable? As the two parts of this paper illustrate, Babrius' poems can differ substantially both from each other and from a hypothetical 'fable model', with the generic expectations that come with it: Babr. 95 shows influences from longer, epic poetry in its structure, narrative mode, characters and subject matter, and style and language; on the other hand, the tetrastichs presented here appear to be modelled on shorter epigrammatic poetry, which is also reflected in their formal make-up, content, and narrative style. In my view, neither of these cases of approximation to another genre is meant in an ironic or parodistic way. Rather, both the smallest and largest poems in the *Mythiambi* are the expression of a learned play on poetic genres; they highlight the fact that Babrius' fables are deeply embedded in the literary culture of their time, interacting with other texts and being influenced by them, all while playing with their

audience's generic expectations of fable and displaying knowledge, skill, and appreciation for ancient literature in general.[70]

If one accepts this perspective on the *Mythiambi* as a work of literature that participates in the literary discourse of its time, the ramifications for the interpretation both of single poems and of the collection as a whole are far-reaching. One may, for example, interpret the position (and juxtaposition) of long and short poetry in Babrius' collection as a deliberate artistic decision: if the original fable book contained around 200 poems, as has been suggested,[71] our epic fable, Babr. 95, would sit squarely at the centre of the collection — a strikingly similar setup to what we find in other ancient poetry books such as Catullus' *carmina*.[72] This brings into focus the position of the epigrammatic fables too: they are regularly grouped together, often in sets of two or three, also an arrangement that has parallels in ancient poetry books[73] and one that hints at some system of internal coherence.[74] Finally, it seems noteworthy that the contrasting literary play between very long and very short poetry is highlighted by grouping them closely together: Babr. 95, the longest poem in the collection, is immediately followed by Babr. 96, another short four-liner. These are just some of the possibilities that emerge if one accepts genre — meaning a set of expectations that guide a reader's experience — as a criterion of interpretation.

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70 Babrius' playfully learned engagement with ancient literature is not limited to epic and epigram; he alludes to several other genres such as tragedy, satire, love elegy, and bucolic; cf. Spielhofer 2023, 32–33.

71 Cf. n. 6.

72 In Catullus' book of poems, his epyllion, c. 64, is also at the centre of the collection; cf. also Höschele 2010, 284, who argues for a similar emphasis on the centre of the *Corpus Priapeorum*, though on lexical rather than quantitative grounds.

73 Such arrangements are often based on content, such as Catullus' *basia* poems 5 and 7 (with 6 in a transitional position; cf. Holzberg 2002, 24–25) or similar groups of poems in the *Corpus Priapeorum* (e.g. 1–2; 6–7; 12–13; 26–27; 40–41; 42–43; 45–47; 60–63; 76–80; cf. Höschele 2010, 273–307).

74 Cf. e.g. Babr. 39–41; 80–83; 109–110; also interesting are certain patterns of repetition: 29–39; 40–60–80–90–110; cf. Höschele 2010 for similar patterns in ancient epigram collections.

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Margot Neger

Epigrammatic Elements in the Fables of Avianus

Abstract: By choosing the elegiac distich as the metre for his fables, the late antique poet Avianus innovated in the tradition of the genre of fable. In their metre and length, however, Avianus' fables have much in common with elegy and epigram. The present contribution compares Avianus' fables to epigrammatic poetry and similar types of *carmina minora*. At first glance, Avianus' poems lack the pointedness and wit of epigrams such as those of Martial. However, in Late Antiquity the definition of epigrammatic poetry is quite fluid and broad, encompassing a great variety of poetic types. The paper examines Avianus' interaction with the genre of epigram and demonstrates that many of his fables have striking similarities with epigrammatic poetry in the use of motifs, metapoetic allusions, and literary play. Avianus seems to be well aware of the epigrammatic tradition, using epigrammatic motifs and techniques in his elegiac fables, which could also be read as epideictic epigrams that take fables as their main topic.

1 Introduction

By choosing the elegiac distich as the metre of his verse fables, the late antique poet Avianus added an innovative element to the tradition of the fable genre, after Phaedrus' *senarii* and Babrius' choliambics. However, Avianus was not the first poet to present material from the fable tradition in elegiacs. In his monograph on the ancient fable, Holzberg refers to some poems from the *Greek Anthology* as parallel cases where motifs known from fables are varied in this metre.[1] However, as Holzberg argues, the Greek epigrammatists were less interested in conveying a moral message than in adapting the topics of fables to the conventions of epigrammatic poetry. Although some of the surviving Greek and Roman verse fables have a narrative structure reminiscent of epigrammatic poetry,[2] Holzberg does not believe that the poems of Avianus could be characterized as short and pointed, a feature otherwise typical of epigrams. It is certainly true that in most cases Avianus

1 *Anth. Pal.* 6.217; 7.210; 9.3; 9.86; 9.99; 11.348; cf. Holzberg 2012, 70; for fables in epigrams of the *Greek Anthology*, see Christodoulou 2020 and Christodoulou's contribution in this volume.

2 See Mattiacci 2011; Neger 2022; see also Weinreich 1931.

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extends the narratives of his models, especially Babrius, rather than condensing them. However, with regard to the length of individual poems it it should be noted that Avianus avoids the large fluctuations of Babrius' collection where the longest fable reaches an almost epic dimension of 102 lines (Babr. 95), whereas the shortest poems consist of tetrastichs (Babr. 8, 29, 39–41, 54, 60, 73, 80–81, 83, 90, 96, 109–110, 113, 121, 133).[3] In comparison with Babrius, we find a more even distribution of longer and shorter poems in Avianus' collection, with the shortest fable (27) comprising 10 lines, the longest (9) extending over 24 verses. As Lukas Spielhofer demonstrates in this volume, Babrius' tetrastichs are characterized by epigrammatic wit and pointedness. Avianus' fables are certainly less witty, but still, as I would like to suggest, a comparison of his fables with the genre of epigram may be a fruitful enterprise as well; this seems to be all the more true as especially in Late Antiquity, ways of defining epigrammatic poetry are quite fluid and broad, encompassing a great variety of poetic types.[4] For instance, writing at the end of the 5th century CE, Sidonius Apollinaris even labels poems of more than a hundred lines and with a more lyrical character as epigrams — e.g. the poems embedded in his letters 8.9 and 9.13 —,[5] while he also mentions contemporary epigrammatists who preferred to keep their compositions brief and took care not to exceed a length of four lines, such as the rhetor Lampridius to whom Sidonius dedicates the obituary letter 8.11.[6] Avianus, of course, never uses the term *epigramma* in his collection, but it does not seem out of place to read his œuvre in the wider context of epigrammatic compositions both earlier and contemporary. Jochen Küppers in his monograph on Avianus has already pointed out that another context that should be considered is the late antique epigrams such as those of Ausonius and the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, in which Greek models are used and rewritten in a similar way to Avianus.[7]

3 See Spielhofer's contribution in this volume. Phaedrus' fables also show significant differences in terms of length, with the prologue to Book 3 comprising 63 lines, followed by Phaed. 3.10 Z. [= G.] with 60 lines; the shortest poems are Phaed. *app*. 2 Z. [= G.] with 3 lines (the text is probably incomplete) as well as 1.7 Z. [= G.], 5.23 Z. [= 4.24 G.], and *app*. 22 Z. [= 24 G.] of 4 lines. For tetrastichs and the ideal of brevity in Byzantine fable, see Scognamiglio's contribution in this volume.

4 See Mondin 2019; for Late Antique epigram, see also Munari 1958; Guipponi-Gineste/Urlacher-Becht 2013.

5 Sid. Apoll. *Epist*. 8.9.3: *epigrammatis* [...] *lemma*; *Epist*. 9.13.5: *epigrammata singulorum*.

6 Sid. Apoll. *Epist*. 8.11.7: *praeterea quod ad epigrammata spectat, non copia sed acumine placens, quae nec breuius disticho neque longius tetrasticho finiebantur* ("now further, as regards epigrams, he gave pleasure not by length but by point; they were never shorter than a couplet or longer than a quatrain"; transl. Anderson).

7 Küppers 1977, 199–204.

2 Paratexts

A first peculiarity that links Avianus' collection to the tradition of ancient epigram is his decision to introduce his fables with a prose epistle addressed to a Theodosius, usually identified as the famous Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius.[8] The combination of prose prefaces with poetry books appears first in the works of Martial and Statius, and later we find examples in the works of Ausonius, who continues this literary strategy by opening several of his poetic collections with prose epistles.[9] On the other hand, one might here also mention prose letters, such as those of Pliny the Younger and Symmachus, which sometimes contain shorter poems as inserts, some of them in elegiacs.[10]

Avianus in his prose epistle creates a genealogy of the fable genre by referring in loose chronological order to Aesop, Socrates, Horace, Babrius, and Phaedrus, a series of predecessors to which he adds his own name at the end. Aside from Babrius' second prologue, one may also be reminded of Ovid's catalogue of models in the famous autobiographical poem in the *Tristia* where the elegist presents himself as a successor to Gallus, Tibullus, and Propertius:

> Vergilium uidi tantum, nec auara Tibullo
> tempus amicitiae fata dedere meae.
> successor fuit hic tibi, Galle, Propertius illi;
> quartus ab his serie temporis ipse fui.
> (Ov. *Tr*. 4.10.51–54)

> Vergil — I only saw him, and envious fate did not give enough time to Tibullus to be my friend. He was your successor, Gallus, and Propertius followed him. I myself was the fourth in this chronological order.
> (Transl. M.N.)

A similar generic genealogy also appears in the first prose epistle of Martial's epigrams, there in the context of justifying obscene language as an important characteristic of epigrammatic poetry (1 *praef*.): *Lasciuam uerborum ueritatem, id est epigrammaton linguam, excusarem, si meum esset exemplum: sic scribit Catullus, sic Marsus, sic Pedo, sic Gaetulicus, sic quicumque perlegitur* ("I would justify the sexually explicit vocabulary, which is the language of epigram, if I had offered

8 See Cameron 1967; Küppers 1977, 28–64; against this view Luzzatto 1984; cf. Holzberg 2012, 76–77, with a survey of the debate.

9 For prose epistles opening poetry books, see Janson 1964; Pavlovskis 1967.

10 Pliny the Younger: *Ep*. 3.21; 4.14; 4.27; 6.10; 7.4; 7.9; 9.19; Symmachus: *Ep*. 1.1; 1.2; 1.8.

the first example: this is how Catullus writes, and Marsus, and Pedo, and Gaetulicus, and whoever is read entirely"). Similar to Ovid and Avianus, Martial too constructs a more-or-less chronological succession of predecessors, here from the time of the Roman Republic (Catullus) via the age of Augustus (Domitius Marsus and Albinovanus Pedo) to the reign of Tiberius (with Lentulus Gaetulicus, consul in 26 CE).[11]

Avianus' preface also has some similarities to the prefaces of Ausonius. For example, when he states that he wrote fables in the elegiac metre which were composed *rudi Latinitate* ("in crude Latin"), this does not necessarily mean that he is referring to a Latin collection of prose fables, but could also be playfully undercutting his own work.[12] One could compare Ausonius' preface to the *Bissula*, a collection he characterizes as *poematia, quae luseram* […] *rudia et incohata* ("poems, which I had composed playfully [...] and in crude, unfinished form"). Moreover, Avianus' characterization of his collection at the end of the epistle (*habes ergo opus, quo animum oblectes, ingenium exerceas, sollicitudinem leues, totumque uiuendi ordinem cautus agnoscas* ["here you have a work to entertain your mind, to exercise your intellect, to mitigate your anxiety, and to recognize the whole course of life attentively"]) is reminiscent of not only Phaedrus' first prologue (1 *prol.* 3–4: *risum mouet* […] *prudenti uitam consilio monet* ["it arouses laughter [...] gives prudent advice for life"]),[13] but also Pliny the Younger's characterization of epigrammatic poetry as *carmen argutum et breue* ("witty and short poem") in letter 7.9.12–13:[14]

> itaque summi oratores, summi etiam uiri sic se aut **exercebant** aut **delectabant**, immo **delectabant exercebantque**. nam mirum est ut his opusculis **animus** intendatur **remittatur**. recipiunt enim amores odia iras misericordiam urbanitatem, omnia denique quae in **uita** atque etiam in foro causisque uersantur.
>
> (Plin. *Ep.* 7.9.12–13)

11 One could add the letters of Pliny the Younger where Pliny justifies his decision to compose epigrammatic poetry. After invoking the authority of Catullus in *Ep.* 4.14, he offers a list of Roman individuals — in his case men of high standing — who also enjoyed composing light poetry in their *otium* (*Ep.* 5.3).

12 For this interpretation, see the translation of Duff/Duff 1934, 683: "writing in unembellished Latin"; Küppers 1977, 186–187; for the other view (a prose paraphrase of Babrius), see Cameron 1967, 398–399; Mann 2015, 264, offers a third possibility, namely that Avianus is referring to the Latin fable tradition in general; see Poms in this volume.

13 Uden 2009, 113; Mann 2015, 266.

14 For this letter, see Keeline 2013; Whitton 2019, 272–322.

> And therefore the greatest orators, and also the greatest men, used to exercise or entertain themselves, or — better — to entertain *and* exercise themselves in this way. For it is striking how through these little works the mind is both concentrated and relaxed. They encompass our feelings of love, hatred, anger, compassion, and refinement — in sum, everything that happens in life and even in our public and legal activities.
>
> (Transl. M.N.)

There are clear lexical overlaps between Pliny's letter and Avianus' *Epistula ad Theodosium*: Pliny's *exercebant* is echoed through Avianus' *exerceas*, whereas *delectabant* and *remittatur* are varied through the synonyms *oblectes* and *leues* in Avianus' text. Both writers emphasize the effect that the composition or reading of short poems has on the mind (*animus*) and stress their connection with matters of real life (*uita*). The *ingenium* ('intellect') which, according to Avianus, is exercised through the reading of his fables also plays a prominent role in Pliny's letter: in a poem that Pliny inserts into the same letter to illustrate his argument, he states that the human mind has to be trained and kept agile through a variety of intellectual studies: *sic hominum ingenium flecti ducique per artes | non rigidas docta mobilitate decet* ("so the human intellect has to be kept agile and guided through various disciplines with learned flexibility", *Ep*. 7.9.11.7–8).

3 Poetological motifs in fables 1–3

Avianus' fables have until now mainly been studied in relation to their role within the fable tradition itself and their use of the language and style of classical poets such as Vergil, Ovid, Horace, and Propertius.[15] I would like to suggest in this chapter that it could also be fruitful to examine in more detail the interaction of the fables with the broader tradition of epigrammatic and occasional poetry.[16] One might bear in mind that, despite Martial's attempts to define epigrammatic poetry and distinguish it from other literary genres, throughout antiquity the generic boundaries of poems that we now classify as epigrams were never particularly narrow.[17] Catullus, for instance, whom Martial refers to as his most important

15 See e.g. Küppers 1977; Adrados 2000, 254–274; Scanzo 2001; Holzberg 2012, 69–79.

16 For a similar approach, see Spielhofer's contribution in this volume, which discusses epigrammatic elements in Babrius' fables.

17 See Holzberg 1988, 24: "Von allen seinen griechischen und römischen Vorgängern innerhalb der Gattung Epigramm [...] unterscheidet sich Martial in seiner Formkunst besonders darin, dass die überwiegende Mehrzahl seiner Epigramme auf eine besinnliche oder witzige Pointe zugespitzt ist" ("From all his Greek and Roman predecessors within the genre of the epigram [...]

model, never uses the term *epigramma*.[18] Martial's contemporary Pliny the Younger, who in letter 4.14 ponders the titles by which he could have labelled his epigrams, provides a catalogue of several alternatives: *proinde, siue epigrammata siue idyllia siue eclogas siue, ut multi, poematia seu quod aliud uocare malueris, licebit uoces; ego tantum hendecasyllabos praesto* ("therefore, if you prefer to call them 'epigrams' or 'idylls' or 'eclogues' or, as many do, 'poems' or otherwise, this is of course legitimate; I offer only 'hendecasyllables'", 4.14.9). For Pliny, the term *epigramma* is interchangeable with various other types of short poems such as idylls, eclogues, and the like.[19]

Viewed in this light, it is certainly legitimate to investigate the ways in which Avianus' fables may have been influenced by the broader tradition of epigram and *carmina minora*. On a formal level, Avianus with his elegiac fables offers something comparable to monothematic collections of poems such as Ausonius' *Parentalia*, *Professores*, *Bissula*, *Caesares*, and so on.[20] In addition, playing with generic boundaries is a feature that epigram and verse fables seem to share. Generic markers and metapoetic symbols are especially dense at the beginning of Avianus' collection. Already the first fable plays with the literary conventions of elegy and epigram, as the poem varies, or even parodies, various motifs of Latin love elegy:[21] the wolf, having heard the countrywoman's words, remains *peruigil ante fores* ("vigilant in front of the door"), resembling the *exclusus amator* of Latin love elegy, transformed into an *exclusus praedator* in the fable. The *lassata membra* ("weary body") of the baby boy who has become tired and falls asleep replace the erotic weariness of the elegiac lovers after the act of love-making: *lassi requieuimus ambo* ("exhausted we both lay down to rest", Ov. *Am*. 1.5.25).

It seems that, especially in the fables at the beginning of the book, the motif of literary smallness, brevity, and humbleness or low status is lurking behind allegorical stories with animals as protagonists. In the second poem we encounter a turtle who wants to fly with the help of an eagle but dies in the attempt.[22] Besides the moral message, the turtle may also serve as a symbol or warning against the aspirations of a small genre like the fable to aim too high and claim the fame and reputation of epic or tragic poetry. Some of the vocabulary used by Avianus in this

Martial's formal art differs particularly in that the vast majority of his epigrams are centred on a thoughtful or witty punch line"); Citroni 2019, 35; cf. Puelma 1996 and 1997 on the use of the term ἐπίγραμμα/*epigramma* in Greek and Latin literature; Neger 2012; Mindt 2013.

18 See Neger 2012, 55.

19 See Citroni 2003 and 2004.

20 For Ausonius, see Pastorino 1971; Green 1991; Dräger 2011–2015.

21 See Poms' contribution in this volume.

22 Cf. Babr. 115; Ellis 1887, *ad loc.*; Küppers 1977, 111–118.

fable could also be understood as literary critical terms: *sublimis* ("lofty", 11) evokes *sublimitas* ("loftiness"),[23] *ingemuit* ("she moaned", 12) recalls the idea of elegy as a lamentation (ἔ ἔ λέγειν),[24] *labor* ("toil", 14) echoes the famous Callimachean or Horatian ideal of *labor et lima*.[25] The phrase *tardo* […] *gressu* ("slow pace", 5) referring to the turtle's slow movements could also recall the elegiac metre, which is personified in Ovid's *Am*. 3.1.8 and depicted as a limping woman (*et, puto, pes illi longior alter erat* ["and, I think, one of her feet was longer"]),[26] or the choliambic metre (σκάζων) used by Babrius, Avianus' most important model. Moreover, the verb *tumescit* ("swells", 15) in the epimythium of a poem located at the beginning of the collection might not only be read literally as a warning not to aspire to what is beyond one's reach, but also not to allow the work to grow too big in size. Finally, one may wonder if we are supposed to draw a connection between the *avis* as the fable's protagonist (*pennatis avibus*, 2) and the name of the fable author.

The motif of walking also appears in poem 3 about two crabs, where the mother crab tries to correct or straighten her offspring's way of walking, although she is not able to demonstrate it correctly herself:

> "ne tibi transuerso placeant haec deuia, nate, 5
> rursus in obliquos neu uelis ire pedes,
> sed nisu contenta ferens uestigia recto
> innocuos proso tramite siste gradus."[27]
> (Avian. 3.5–8)

> "Don't go zigzag and choose these crooked ways, my child, and don't seek to move backwards and slantwise on your feet. Step out vigorously with straightforward effort and plant your footsteps safely in the onward path."
>
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

The mother crab who reproaches her child for its walking style not only serves as a funny example of someone who, although incompetent herself, criticizes the faults of others, but may also be read as an allegory for a critic who is dissatisfied

23 Cf. the work *De sublimitate* / Περὶ ὕψους of Ps.-Longinus; for the *sublimitas* of epic poetry, cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.5.

24 For this popular etymology, see Holzberg 2006, 5.

25 Hor. *Ars P.* 291: *limae labor*.

26 Cf. Stat. *Silv*. 1.2.7–10; the idea that elegiac verses create some sort of delay, whereas hexameters are swifter, is also expressed in the *Carmen de providentia Dei* written by a Pseudo-Prosper around 416/417 CE, thus close in time to Avianus' fables: *ac ne sermo moram patiatur ab impare uersu | heroi numeris porrige pentametrum* ("but lest my speech be delayed by unequal verse, stretch the pentameter to the heroic metre", 95–96); see Cutino 2011.

27 The Latin text of Avianus follows the edition of Guaglianone 1958.

with the metrical rhythm: instead of the elegiac distich with its uneven lines, she would prefer something more straightforward such as prose (cf. *proso* […] *tramite*, 8);[28] however, the critic is not able to produce anything better than the poet. One might compare a short poem by Claudian on a critic with gout:[29]

> Quae tibi cum pedibus ratio? quid carmina culpas?
> scandere qui nescis, uersiculos laceras?
> "claudicat hic uersus; haec" inquit "syllaba nutat";
> atque nihil prorsus stare putas podager.
> (Claud. *carm. min.* 13 [= 79])

> What's your problem with feet? Why do you condemn my poems? Are you who can't get up really abusing my little verses? "This verse limps" you snap, "this syllable falters." And so you think that nothing stands up straight, you gout-ridden man.
>
> (Transl. Ferriss)[30]

The wit of the poem is based on the double meaning of *pes* as the foot both in a literal sense and as the foot of the metre. Claudian in his scoptic epigram is mocking an anonymous opponent with gout, i.e. someone unable to walk, for criticizing his (Claudian's) verses, among them the present poem in elegiacs. It almost seems as if Avianus has turned this satiric epigram into a fable with animal protagonists.[31] Neither Claudian's *podager* nor the mother crab in Avianus' poem is capable of doing a better job than the target of their criticism. Thus, when the small crab characterizes its mother as a *censor* who marks shortcomings (*notes*, 12), though she is not flawless herself (*uitiosa*, 12), one could compare Martial's and Phaedrus' attempts to defend themselves against literary censorship (*innocuos censura potest permittere lusus* ["censorship can allow harmless trifles"], Mart. 1.4.7); in this context, both poets often address the figure of Cato as the personification of the stern critic of light poetry (Phaed. 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.]; Mart. 1 *praef.*).

28 One might also think of Horace's *musa pedestris*, i.e. the genre of satire (Hor. *Sat.* 2.6.17).

29 For this poem and Catullus 71, see Ferriss 2009; for further allusions to Claudian in Avianus' fables, see Küppers 1977, 60–63.

30 Ferriss 2009, 377.

31 Avianus' fable is, of course, based on Babrius 109, which consists of only four lines, and so has an epigrammatic character too (see Spielhofer's contribution); however, it seems that Avianus' poem has been "filtered" through Claudian's epigram and enriched by its poetological message.

4 Travellers and physicians

It seems that Avianus' fables, at least at the beginning of the collection, conceal poetological motifs and literary critical discourses behind fictional stories. The motif of walking is continued in fable 4 where we encounter a *uiator*, a figure also characteristic of epigrammatic poetry, usually in the role of the reader who passes by and is addressed by the speaker of the poem.[32] During a competition between Boreas (the north wind) and Phoebus (the sun), a randomly chosen *uiator* is to be made to take off his coat due to the natural forces unleashed by the two opponents: *pallia nudato decutienda uiro* ("to make the man take off his coat and disrobe", 6). Whereas Boreas does not manage to accomplish this aim by sending wind and rain, Phoebus wins the competition by increasing the heat, forcing the wanderer to take off his *pallium* and making him sit down and rest: *donec lassa olens requiescere membra uiator | deposita fessus ueste sederet humi* ("until the traveller wanted to rest his exhausted body, took off his coat, and sat down on the ground", 13–14). In my opinion, there are some metapoetic messages connected with the traveller's character: his coat, the *pallium*, reminds one of ancient comedy, the *fabula palliata*, whereas nudity (*nudato* […] *uiro*) could be connected with the mime, a type of comic drama belonging to a lower literary level; mime actors were usually barefoot, without masks, and female actresses would perform something like a striptease on stage.[33] Taking off the *pallium* and showing oneself naked thus might also resemble a movement downwards in the hierarchy of comic genres. Mime is a theatrical genre to which Martial too repeatedly compares the character of his epigrams.[34]

If we read Avianus' elegiac verse fables as poems similar to ancient epigrams, the figure of the resting *uiator* could also have other metapoetic implications, serving as the counterpart of the reader who, after only four fables, is already exhausted and wants to rest. Compare, for instance, Martial 2.6 where the lazy reader — likewise near the beginning of the book — is addressed and compared to a traveller (*uiator*) who needs to rest already after a short distance:[35]

32 See Höschele 2007.

33 Cf. Diom. III 490 Keil; Val. Max. 2.10.8; for ancient mime, see Panayotakis 2010, 1–32.

34 See Gaffney 1976; Neger 2012, 232–235.

35 For this epigram, see Williams 2004, *ad loc.*; Höschele 2010, 44–46; a lazy reader also appears in Mart. 5.80 and Phaed. 3 *prol.* 4–5 Z. [= G.]; see Neger 2022, 155.

I nunc, edere me iube libellos.
lectis uix tibi paginis duabus
spectas eschatocollion, Seuere,
et longas trahis oscitationes.
[…]
lassus tam cito deficis uiator,
et cum currere debeas Bouillas,
interiungere quaeris ad Camenas?
(Mart. 2.6)

Go ahead, tell me to publish my little books! You have hardly read a couple of pages, Severus, and you are looking at the final sheet and fetching lengthy yawns. […] Does the traveller flag so quickly? When you ought to drive to Bovillae, do you want to change horses at the Camenae?

(Transl. Shackleton Bailey)

Avianus' fourth fable primarily teaches the moral message that "no one can win after threats have already been sent in advance" (*nullum praemissis uincere posse minis*, 16); on a second level, however, this tale could imply that Avianus' readers have already got tired at this stage, similar to the Severus whom Martial makes fun of by comparing him to a weary traveller.

The tradition of the satirical epigram, especially about various professions such as doctors, seems to have inspired Avianus 6, about a charlatan frog who claims he can heal the other animals and extend their lives.[36]

Edita gurgitibus limoque immersa profundo
et luteis tantum semper amica uadis,
ad superos colles herbosaque prata recurrens
mulcebat miseras turgida rana feras,
callida quod posset grauibus succurrere morbis
et uitam ingenio continuare suo;
nec se Paeonio iactat cessisse magistro,
quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos.
tunc uulpes pecudum ridens astuta quietem,
uerborum uacuam prodidit esse fidem:
"haec dabit aegrotis" inquit "medicamina membris,
pallida caeruleus cui notat ora color?"
(Avian. 6)

Sprung from pools, immersed in depths of mud, the constant friend of naught but miry shallows, a distended frog, revisiting the hills above and the grassy meadows, sought to comfort the afflicted beasts with the assurance that her leech-craft could relieve their sore diseases

36 For doctors as targets of satirical epigrams, see Ehrhardt 1974; Neger/Holzberg 2020.

and her genius could prolong their lives. Her boast was that she had never been surpassed by the Paeonian master, though he attended the everlasting gods in turn. Then a cunning vixen, laughing at the acquiescence of the cattle, disclosed the futility of giving credence to words: "Is physic," she asked, "going to be prescribed for diseased limbs by this frog, whose pale face is sicklied over with a livid hue?"

(Transl. Duff/Duff)

The fable consists of three parts of equal length: the first four lines introduce the frog (1–4), the next four lines (5–8) contain its speech in *oratio obliqua*, whereas in the last four lines (9–12) the clever fox appears who exposes the frog as a charlatan. The last distich of the poem concludes the narrative pointedly with the fox's direct speech deriding the frog's pale face. Avianus' fable is modelled on the shorter Greek version by Babrius:[37]

Ὁ τελμάτων ἔνοικος ὁ σκιῇ χαίρων,
ὁ ζῶν ὀρυκτοῖς βάτραχος παρ᾽ εὐρίποις,
εἰς γῆς παρελθὼν ἔλεγε πᾶσι τοῖς ζῴοις·
"ἰατρός εἰμι φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμων,
οἷων ταχ᾽ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδ᾽ ὁ Παιήων, 5
ὃς Ὄλυμπον οἰκεῖ καὶ θεοὺς ἰατρεύει."
"καὶ πῶς" ἀλώπηξ εἶπεν "ἄλλον ἰήσῃ,
ὃς σαυτὸν οὕτω χλωρὸν ὄντα μὴ σῴζεις;"
(Babr. 120)

That denizen of the swamps who likes the shade, the frog, who lives beside the ditches, once came forth on dry land and bragged to all the creatures: "I'm a physician, skilled in the use of drugs such as no one, doubtless, knows, not even Paean who lives on Olympus, physician to the gods." "And how," said a fox, "can you cure someone else, when you can't save yourself from being so deathly pale?"

(Transl. Perry)

Whereas Avianus splits the narrative into three equal sections of four lines each, Babrius[38] introduces the frog in three lines (1–3), uses another three lines for the frog's speech, here in *oratio recta* (4–6), and immediately adds two lines of direct speech by the fox, wittily exposing the frog as a quack-doctor. Avianus adds four lines to the Greek version and reduces the narrative speed of Babrius' version by rendering the frog's words in indirect speech and inserting two lines before the direct speech of the fox. Both in Babrius' and in Avianus' version the frog compares himself to the "Paeonian master", i.e. the mythological doctor Paean.[39] Only

37 Ellis 1887, 61; Küppers 1977, 74–75.

38 For Babrius' version, see Mann 2015, 232.

39 Παιήων in Homer's *Iliad* (5.401–402; 5.899–904).

in Avianus' poem, however, does the frog boast of being able to prolong the lives of his patients (*et uitam ingenio continuare suo*, 6). Ellis cites the parallel of Ausonius' *Parentalia* 1.13–14,[40] but without discussing possible implications; I wonder if Avianus' frog deliberately imitates the first poem of that collection (written between 380 and 390 CE), an epitaph for Ausonius' father Julius Ausonius, a doctor. On his father's medical skills Ausonius writes as follows:[41]

> praeditus **et uitas** hominum *ratione medendi*
> **porrigere** et fatis amplificare moras.
> (Auson. *Parent*. 1.13–14)

> To him was given the power to prolong men's lives by means of medicine, and make the Fates wait their full time.
> (Transl. Evelyn-White)

In Ausonius' poem, the enjambment and hyperbaton of object (*uitas*) and verb (*porrigere*) imitate the idea of the physician being able to prolong his patients' lives. It would be a witty variation of this Late Antique funeral epigram if the frog's self-praise in Avianus' poem (*callida quod posset grauibus succurrere morbis | et uitam ingenio continuare suo*, 5–6)[42] were read as a deliberate imitation of Ausonius' poem: instead of *uitas porrigere*, Avianus uses the synonym *uitam continuare*, at the same time shortening the hyperbaton of Ausonius' poem,[43] and replaces *ratione medendi* through *ingenio suo*. Avianus' fable on the charlatan frog thus combines two different epigrammatic subtypes: the funeral epigram on a doctor at the beginning of Ausonius' *Parentalia*,[44] and the tradition of satirical epigrams on incompetent physicians, a topic especially popular in the Imperial age.[45] Both book 11

40 Ellis 1887, 62.

41 See Lolli 1997, 64–65.

42 The phrase *succurrere morbis* (5) seems to have been borrowed from Quintus Serenus' *Liber medicinalis* where, among other things, remedies for eye complaints are discussed (206): *haec etiam annosis poterunt succurrere morbis*.

43 Perhaps a humorous hint that the frog is not able to prolong the life of his patients to the same extent as Ausonius' father, who was a real doctor. This idea is also suggested by metrical peculiarities: the ending of the accusative *uitam* in line 6 has to be elided before *ingenio* which starts with a vowel; thus, in the pentameter the life is actually shortened by losing a syllable.

44 One could also compare the epigrams praising Hippocrates in the *Greek Anthology*: in *Anth. Pal.* 9.53 it is said that Hippocrates had saved the lives of λαῶν ἔθνεα ("whole peoples") and that νεκύων ἦν σπάνις εἰν ᾿Αίδῃ ("there was a scarcity of dead in Hades"; transl. Paton); for further epigrams praising the skills of doctors, cf. *Anth. Gr*. 16.267–274.

45 For other fables on medical topics, see Phaed. 1.14 Z. [= G.] (with Gärtner 2015, *ad loc.*) and Babr. 121 (again an "epigrammatic" fable of only four lines).

of the *Greek Anthology* and Martial's epigrams contain several examples mocking incompetent doctors and charlatans.[46] Ausonius, too, continues this tradition in an epigram which, interestingly, was inspired by one of Babrius' fables:[47]

Languentem Gaium morituram dixerat olim
Eunomus. euasit fati ope, non medici.
paulo post ipsum uidet, aut uidisse putauit,
pallentem et multa mortis in effigie.
"Quis tu?" "Gaius," ait. "Viuisne?" hic abnuit. "Et quid
nunc agis hic?" "Missu Ditis", ait, "uenio,
ut, quia notitiam rerumque hominumque tenerem,
accirem medicos." Eunomus obriguit.
tum Gaius: "Metuas nihil, Eunome. dixi ego et omnes,
nullum, qui saperet, dicere te medicum."
(Auson. *Epigr*. 79 Kay [= 4 Evelyn-White])

Eunomus had once pronounced that Gaius would die of his sickness. He slipped away, Fate — not the doctor — aiding. A little afterwards the doctor saw, or thought he saw, the man, pale, and in death's very likeness. "Who art thou?" he asked. "Gaius," he answered. "Art thou alive?" He answered "No." "And what now dost thou here?" "I come," said he, "at the behest of Dis, because I still retained knowledge of the world and men, to summon to him doctors." Eunomus grew stiff with fright. Then Gaius: "Fear nothing, Eunomus: I said, as all men say, that no man who is wise calls you a doctor."

(Transl. Evelyn-White)

Ausonius' epigram in 10 elegiac lines condenses a fable of Babrius (75) that narrates the same story in 20 choliambics.[48] The narrative pace in Ausonius' epigram is much faster and the last distich pointedly concludes the epigram with the words uttered by Gaius the patient. The wit of the epigram is based, among other things, on the fact that the doctor Eunomus is not able to distinguish a living person from a dead one and has to ask Gaius if he is alive (*Viuisne?*, 5).

46 See Ehrhardt 1974; Neger/Holzberg 2020; Fögen 2024.

47 See Kay 2001, 228–229.

48 See Green 1991, *ad loc.*; Neger/Holzberg 2020, 84–86; Ellis 1887, xxxv, is less than enthusiastic about Ausonius' adaptation of Babrius 75: "With the exception of brevity [...] Ausonius' version has no merit at all. It fails to preserve any part of the charm of the original."

5 Fortune's fickleness and clever solutions

Both Ausonius and Avianus use Babrius' fables as models for satirical poems on charlatans, both human and animal. The interaction of Avianus' fables with epigrammatic versions on similar topics can also be observed in poem 12. In this fable, a farmer finds treasure in his field;[49] after his life has changed for the better due to this discovery, he starts worshipping the goddess Tellus but forgets to pay tribute to Fortuna too. The fable concludes with a speech by Fortuna, who predicts that once the farmer has lost his treasure again, it will be she, Fortuna, whom he will invoke first. The core content of the fable is based on a prose version attributed to Aesop (Aesop. 61 P. [= Hsr.; 84 Ch.]); the conclusion of Avianus' fable, however, with the idea that the treasure will be lost again (*surrepto* […] *auro*, 11),[50] resembles similar reflections in contemporary epigram, such as in Ausonius (*Epigr*. 23 Kay) and a poem from the *Epigrammata Bobiensia* (28); in these poems, the topic of Fortuna's fickleness is showcased with a story about a man who is about to commit suicide but after finding a treasure discards his original plan; instead, the man who had originally hidden the treasure and can no longer find it decides to kill himself. Both epigrams are probably inspired by two Greek models in the *Greek Anthology* (*Anth. Pal.* 9.44–45). As Otto Weinreich suggested, these epigrams could be regarded as condensed versions of a cautionary fable[51] and thus nicely illustrate how the two genres interact.

The fable of the crow and the pitcher which Avianus narrates in poem 27 also has a variation in epigrammatic poetry. Avianus' version reads as follows:

Ingentem sitiens cornix adspexerat urnam,
  quae minimam fundo continuisset aquam.
hanc enisa diu planis effundere campis,
  scilicet ut nimiam pelleret inde sitim,
postquam nulla uiam uirtus dedit, admouet omnes
  indignata noua calliditate dolos.
nam breuis immersis accrescens sponte lapillis
  potandi facilem praebuit unda uiam.
uiribus haec docuit quam sit prudentia maior,
  qua coeptum uolucri explicuisset opus.
(Avian. 27)

49 The fable varies Aesop. 61 P. [= Hsr.; 84 Ch.], see Ellis 1887, 71–73.

50 For antithesis as one of Avianus' preferred stylistic devices, see Küppers 1977, 82.

51 Weinreich 1951; Kay 2001, 126.

> A thirsty crow had spied a huge jar containing a very little water at the bottom. Long did the crow strive to spill this water on the level plain, to banish, of course, thereby her excessive thirst; but, when no valiant effort could provide a way, she lost her temper and with fresh cunning applied all her crafty devices. She threw pebbles in, and the low level of water rose naturally and so supplied an easy way of drinking. This fable has proved the superiority of foresight over stout efforts, as by it the crow accomplished the task she had undertaken.
>
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

The story also survives in the collection of Pseudo-Dositheus (8 Hsr.),[52] but our earliest source is in the *Greek Anthology* in a poem by Bianor (1st century CE) also written in elegiac distichs:[53]

> Καρφαλέος δίψει Φοίβου λάτρις εὖτε γυναικὸς
> εἶδεν ὑπὲρ τύμβου κρωσσίον ὀμβροδόκον,
> κλάγξεν ὑπὲρ χείλους, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ γένυς ἥπτετο βυσσοῦ.
> Φοῖβε, σὺ δ᾽ εἰς τέχνην ὄρνιν ἐκαιρομάνεις·
> χερμάδα δὲ †ψαλμῶν σφαῖρον πότον ἄρπαγι χείλει
> ἔφθανε μαιμάσσων λαοτίνακτον ὕδωρ.
>
> (*Anth. Pal.* 9.272)

> When a crow, the minister of Phoebus, parched with thirst, saw on a woman's tomb a pitcher containing rain-water, it croaked over the mouth but could not reach the bottom with its beak. But, thou, Phoebus, didst inspire the bird with opportune artfulness, and, by dropping pebbles in, it reached in its eagerness with its greedy lips the water set in motion by the stones.
>
> (Transl. Paton)

Like Avianus, Bianor too focuses on a crow; the Greek epideictic epigram tells the story in six lines, which can be divided into two parts: lines 1–3 narrate the problem — a thirsty crow sees a pitcher with water but is unable to reach the water with its beak —, while the second half (4–6) contains the solution that the bird finds with the help of Phoebus. In contrast to the Greek version, the crow in Avianus' fable can solve the problem by herself and does not need Phoebus' inspiration, similar to the version in Ps.-Dositheus (μεθόδῳ ἐπέτυχεν). Avianus also omits the detail that the crow saw the pitcher on a woman's tomb, mentioned in the Greek epigram, thus fading the spatial setting out of the narration. Apart from these details, the story in Avianus' poem (again longer than the Greek model) shows a similar division into two parts: the first four lines narrate the crow's problem, the next four (5–8) the solution. By adding another distich that serves as the epimythium (9–10), Avianus 'marks' his poem as belonging to the fable tradition.

52 See Ellis 1887, 100–101.

53 See Gow/Page 1968, II, 203, with reference to Plin. *HN* 10.125; Plut. *Mor*. 967a; Ael. *NA* 2.48.

6 Statues and tombstones

Finally, we may look at Avianus 23–24, two fables that also share elements typical of inscriptions or epigrams. Poem 23 is about a merchant who has the option of selling a statue of Bacchus either as a dedicatory object for a temple or as an item decorating a tomb:

Venditor insignem referens de marmore Bacchum
  expositum pretio fecerat esse deum.
nobilis hunc quidam funesta in sede sepulcri
  mercari cupiens compositurus erat;
alter adoratis ut ferret numina templis,
  redderet et sacro debita vota loco.
"nunc", ait, "ambiguum facies de mercibus omen,
  cum spes in pretium munera dispar agit,
et me defunctis seu malis tradere diuis,
  siue decus busti, seu uelis esse deum.
subdita namque tibi est magni reuerentia fani,
  atque eadem retines funera nostra manu".
conuenit hoc illis, quibus est permissa potestas,
  an praestare magis seu nocuisse uelint.
(Avian. 23)

A trading craftsman who had fashioned a fine Bacchus in marble had put up the god for sale. A nobleman who wanted to buy it intended to place it in the funereal resting-place containing his tomb. Another wished to present the god in the temple where he worshipped and in the hallowed precincts to fulfil a vow that was owing. "Now," said the statue, "you will make a puzzling forecast about your wares, when two far different prospects set a price upon your work, and you will be in doubt whether you prefer to consign me to the dead or to the gods, whether you wish me to adorn a tomb or to be a deity. To your arbitration is submitted the reverence of a great sanctuary;[54] in your hand also you hold my death-warrant."
This is applicable to those who have it in their power to do a good or a bad turn as they wish.
(Transl. Duff/Duff, slightly modified)

The narration of the *uenditor* and his Bacchus statue consists of two halves: lines 1–6 introduce the merchant and his two customers — for each protagonist Avianus uses one distich (*uenditor* [...] *nobilis* [...] *alter*) —, then in lines 7–12 Bacchus addresses the salesman in direct speech. Finally, an epimythium in one distich (13–14) concludes the fable with a moralizing comment. Avianus' poem is based on a shorter version by Babrius comprising ten lines, where a statue of Hermes,

54 I follow Baehrens' conjecture *fani*; cf. Holzberg 2022, 210.

rather than Bacchus, is offered for sale (30).[55] The structure of Babrius' version is less schematic: lines 1–4 contain an exposition (a sculptor and his two customers), lines 5–7a refer to the evening when the sculptor had not yet sold his statue, and finally in lines 7b–10 Hermes appears to the sculptor in a dream and addresses him in direct speech (9–10). The dream-scene is completely absent from Avianus' version, and instead the statue of Bacchus appears as a 'speaking object', a motif that is also typical of epigrammatic poetry.[56] Speaking images of Dionysus, for example, appear in book 16 of the *Greek Anthology* (16.183–184)[57] and in *Anth. Pal.* 9.748 and poem 20 of the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, in which Dionysus/Bacchus is depicted on a cameo of amethyst.[58]

The motif of the tomb as one of the possible locations for the statue of Bacchus connects fable 23 with poem 24, where a hunter and a lion discuss the iconography of a tombstone:

Certamen longa protractum lite gerebant
uenator quondam nobilis atque leo.
hi cum perpetuum cuperent in iurgia finem,
edita continuo forte sepulcra uident.
illic docta manus flectentem colla leonem
fecerat in gremio procubuisse uiri.
scilicet affirmans pictura teste superbum
se fieri: "exstinctam nam docet esse feram".
ille graues oculos ad inania signa retorquens
infremit et rabido pectore uerba dedit:
"irrita te generis subiit fiducia uestri,
artificis testem si cupis esse manum.
quod si nostra nouum caperet sollertia sensum,
sculperet ut docili pollice saxa leo,
tunc hominem adspiceres oppressum murmure magno,
conderet ut rabidis ultima fata genis."
(Avian. 24)

A huntsman of renown and a lion were once engaged in a contest protracted by long dispute. As they desired to put an end once for all to their quarrel, they saw on the instant, it so

55 Ellis 1887, 92–93; the fable of Avianus and its relation to Babrius' version is discussed by Küppers 1977, 118–123.

56 See Wachter 2010; Schrader 2017; the tradition of the dedicatory epigram may have influenced Avianus' poem 39, in which an old soldier dedicates all his weapons to the fire; his war-trumpet protests against this act in direct speech (9–12); see Ellis 1887, 123–124.

57 See Gow/Page 1968, II, 44.

58 The humour is here based on the antithesis between the god of wine and ἀ-μεθύω; see Nocchi 2016, *ad loc.*; for the role of Dionysus in funeral cult, see Küppers 1977, 120–123.

> happened, a lofty tombstone. Thereon a cunning hand had represented a lion bowing its neck in submission and prostrate in a man's embrace. The hunter asserted that the evidence of that work of art showed his superiority: "Because it shows the death of the beast." The lion, turning downcast eyes to the unreal figures, growled and in fierceness of heart broke into speech: "Vain is the confidence in your human birth that has entered into you, if you desire to have for a witness an artist's hand. If our ingenuity admitted of an extra sense, allowing a lion to engrave stones with skilful touch, then you would behold how the man, overwhelmed by a loud roar, closed his final destiny in ravening jaws."
>
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

The fable starts with an exposition of two lines, introducing the antagonists (*uenator* [...] *leo*, 2), and continues with another distich (3–4), in which the two opponents catch sight of a tomb (*sepulcra*, 4). Lines 5–6 contain a short ekphrasis of the tombstone's iconography, while in lines 7–8 we read the hunter's interpretation of this image. The second half of the poem (9–16) is dedicated to the lion's reaction, containing six lines of direct speech (11–16).[59] This time there is no parallel in Babrius' collection, but only a prose paraphrase and other versions attributed to Aesop that vary the same story (Paraphr. *Ba* 148 Kn.; *Bb* 91; Aesop. 284 P.; [= 264 Hsr.; 59 Ch.]; Ps.-Dosith. 15 Hsr.). As Ursula Gärtner (2023) has pointed out, the description of the tomb and its decoration in lines 5–6 is much more detailed in Avianus' poem than in the Greek prose versions: Avianus offers a mini-ekphrasis enriched through allusions to Vergil and other poets.[60] It is probably not a coincidence that Avianus juxtaposes this fable with the previous, likewise epigrammatic fable on the speaking statue of Bacchus. A scenario like the one depicted in Avianus' fable — a lion killed by a hunter — is also the topic of one of Ausonius' epigrams:

> Quod leo tam tenui patitur sub harundine letum,
> non uires ferri, sed ferientis agunt.
>
> (Auson. *Epigr*. 6 Kay)

> In that a lion suffers death from such a slender arrow, it is not the strength of the metal that does it, but of the archer.
>
> (Transl. Evelyn-White)

According to a superscription to this ekphrastic poem, the emperor Gratian is the hunter who killed the lion with a single arrow.[61] Another motif typical of

59 Gärtner 2023, 346, divides the poem into exposition (1–6), action (7–8), and reaction (9–16).

60 Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 11.622 and 8.630–631; Ov. *Fast.* 3.832; Gärtner 2023, 348; one could also add Tib. 1.8.12: *artificis docta subsecuisse manu*.

61 See Kay 2001, *ad loc*.

epigrammatic poetry is the contemplation and interpretation of a tomb's iconography by visitors to it: book 7 of the *Greek Anthology* contains a series of poems that vary this motif (7.422–429).[62] We also encounter epigrams with lions depicted on tombs, such as *Anth. Pal.* 7.243 and 7.344a+b on the tomb of Leonidas, or 7.426 by Antipater of Sidon on the tomb of a certain Teleutias:[63]

α. "Εἰπέ, λέων, φθιμένοιο τίνος τάφον ἀμφιβέβηκας,
βουφάγε; τίς τᾶς σᾶς ἄξιος ἦν ἀρετᾶς;"
β. "Υἱὸς Θευδώροιο Τελευτίας, ὃς μέγα πάντων
φέρτερος ἦν, θηρῶν ὅσσον ἐγὼ κέκριμαι.
οὐχὶ μάταν ἔστακα, φέρω δέ τι σύμβολον ἀλκᾶς
ἀνέρος· ἦν γὰρ δὴ δυσμενέεσσι λέων."
(*Anth. Pal.* 7.426)

A. "Tell, lion, thou slayer of kine, on whose tomb thou standest there and who was worthy of thy valour." B. "Teleutias, the son of Theodorus, who was far the most valiant of men, as I am judged to be of beasts. Not in vain stand I here, but I emblem the prowess of the man, for he was indeed a lion to his enemies."

(Transl. Paton)

Similar to Avianus' fable, here too a dialogue between a lion and a human observer is staged, although in this case, in line with the epigrammatic fiction that objects have the ability to speak, it is the image of the lion on the tombstone that enters into a conversation with the human; in Avianus' poem, on the other hand, both dialogue partners play the role of the viewer of an image for which they offer differing interpretations.

7 Conclusion

As this survey has shown, Avianus' fables do not contain many direct allusions to epigrammatic poetry, and few of his poems have pointed endings similar to the epigrams of Martial; on the other hand, not all ancient Greek and Latin epigrams are distinguished by pointed endings, and even in Martial's epigram books only

62 See Gutzwiller 1998, 267–276; Neger 2019, 184–185; in addition to the epigrammatic tradition, Avianus' poem seems to imitate the scene in Vergil's *Aeneid* in which Aeneas contemplates the images on Juno's temple in Carthage (*Aen.* 1.464: *animum pictura pascit inani*; cf. Avian. 24.9: *inania signa*); see Gärtner 2023, 349–350.

63 See Gow/Page 1965, 59–60; the epigram perhaps praises a Teleutias from Cos also mentioned in a Coan inscription of the 2nd century BCE.

some of the poems exhibit this feature, which "has been considered emblematic not only of his output but of the entire literary genre".[64] In addition to formal elements such as length and metre, Avianus' fables share similarities with epigrammatic poetry in the use of certain topics, figures, metapoetic allusions, and the way poems interact with other literary genres, absorbing them and adapting them to the aims of Avianus' literary project. Avianus seems to be well aware of the epigrammatic tradition and frequently uses epigrammatic motifs and techniques, perhaps in direct imitation of poets such as Martial, Claudian, and Ausonius. Avianus' poems can therefore be read not only as an innovative contribution to the fable tradition but also as a kind of epideictic epigram with fables as its main topic.

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64 Citroni 2019, 35.

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Federica Scognamiglio

Between Babrius and Ignatios, between Fable and *Metaphrasis*: Rephrasing in Byzantine Dodecasyllables

Abstract: The *Tetrasticha* of Ignatios the Deacon (*c.* 775–847) are fables written in dodecasyllabic quatrains rephrasing the verses of Babrius. With the *Tetrasticha*, the genre of Aesopic fable meets the aim and technique of the *metaphrasis*, which is typical of Byzantine literature. Despite its origin as a school exercise, a *metaphrasis* could occasionally become poetry in its own right. The fable quatrains by Ignatios are not just abridged fables from a longer hypo-text of Babrius. In his *Tetrasticha*, Ignatios addresses the choices, purpose, and features of the Byzantine concept of μεταφράζειν: the Aesopic tale perfectly fits four dodecasyllables not by mere subtraction or substitution of words, but with a clear pursuit of *breuitas*, at the opposite pole from the *auxesis* typical of other kinds of Byzantine *metaphrasis*. Through the analysis of Ignatios' *metaphrasis* and its particular technique, we can appreciate the process of transformation of Aesopic and Babrian ancient fables into Byzantine tetrastich poetry.

1 Introduction

The long journey of the ancient fable as genre and literary product through the centuries — and through other literary genres as well — finally reaches the gates of the Black Sea with a look at Byzantium and its fertile reception of ancient fables. Our discussion begins with the humdrum, together with the conundrum. On the one hand, fables were one of the most common school exercises in Byzantium, so their diffusion and reuse is far from unexpected — this is the humdrum. On the other, the Byzantine *metaphrasis*, here mentioned for its connection with the genre of the Aesopic fables, is not simply a 'genre' — this is the conundrum.

This chapter is a revised version of the paper given at the conference held in Graz (June 2nd–4th, 2022). On that occasion, I took advantage of many ideas proposed in the final discussion, for which I am truly grateful. I wish to thank Luigi Battezzato, Marco Catrambone (together with all the colleagues of the Seminario di Ricerca at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa), and Enrico Magnelli, who read this paper in advance and gave me insightful suggestions.

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2 Fables in Byzantium and the teacher Ignatios the Deacon

Fables, especially the Aesopic ones, enjoyed a great *fortuna* in Byzantine literature and culture.[1] This fact is particularly highlighted by practical evidence: not only are fables often quoted by other authors or referred to in other works, but the Aesopic corpus (or rather, corpora)[2] has one of the widest and most complicated manuscript traditions,[3] demonstrating the diffusion and survival of the fables in Byzantium and all over the Byzantine Empire. In the Aesopic corpora, it is widely known that the Medieval tradition preserves some fables *written* in Byzantine times and *inspired by* the ancient Aesopic model: they are Byzantine rewritings of ancient fables. And on closer inspection, while some of those 'ancient' fables date back to the Classical Age, many others in the Aesopic corpora are quite late, some of them even Late Antique.

At any rate, the Aesopic material offered Byzantine authors the opportunity to continually rewrite and renew, recall and revive the ancient tradition of fables.[4] Suffice it to mention, as an example of rewriting, the famous paraphrase of Babrius' fables, the so-called *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*:[5] it is considered an inde-

1 It must be said that Aesopic fables were much appreciated in Byzantium as 'pieces of morality', as well as anthologies of anecdotes and sayings (e.g. the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the like). We should think of the 'fable in Byzantium' as a means to explain and apply moral precepts. This notion helps us understand why 'pagan features' were often permitted when reusing ancient fables: allegory was important in this sense. Of course, the survival of moralistic materials (Aesopic fables included) was ensured by schools, which used fables as didactic material. For fables in Byzantium, see for example Papademetriou 1983; Adrados 2000 (esp. part three 'The Fable in the Middle Ages'); van Dijk 2002.

2 Working with Aesopic corpora can be rather puzzling. Some scholars refer to the fables as 'Aesop's fables', others prefer (as I do) the open definition of 'Aesopic material': the first is a common term (too narrow in scope, in my opinion) that scholars may use for the sake of brevity, but the latter gives more attention to the philological status of the material we find in the manuscript tradition, i.e. more than just one *recensio* of fables and very different manuscript traditions. In the present contribution, I discuss *recensio*/*recensiones* of Aesopic texts according to the definitions and numberings of Chambry 1925/26, 1–28, Hausrath 1959/1970, and Perry 1952.

3 Other authors whose manuscript traditions are broad and difficult to organize, and whose witnesses are almost countless, are for example Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and John Damascene. Of course, they were very famous and much studied in Byzantium.

4 See on this Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 229–231.

5 On the dating of this group of fables, and its genesis, see also Vaio 1984; Adrados 2000, 463–492. I have studied the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* both as a paraphrase of Babrius and as a precise collection of fables with a moralistic aim, see Scognamiglio 2022a.

pendent Aesopic *recensio* — namely, the fourth one —,[6] and shows the distinctive patterns of paraphrasing an ancient text, such as the prose renderings of Babrius' verses, which are simplified and contain explanations or additional details. The mention of the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* of Babrius here is not arbitrary: it is in a certain way a good term of comparison for our discussion.

Apart from the fables specifically named after Aesop and/or attributed to him, another significant figure in the *fortuna* of fables in Byzantium was an author who decided to stick to one precise model, namely to Babrius and his iambic fables,[7] an author whose work is sometimes so close to the Babrian version that it could be considered almost an indirect witness to the lost Babrian fables, while at the same time the author is an independent poet deeply and creatively reusing the ancient model: Ignatios the Deacon.

Ignatios, a school teacher in Constantinople whose life probably spanned from the late eighth to the mid-ninth century (*c*. 775–847, or *c*. 795–870 CE, according to different scholars)[8] during the Second Iconoclasm,[9] is the author of short verse fables in the 'Aesopic manner', the so-called *Tetrasticha*.[10] The great number

6 According to Chambry 1925/26, 17–19.

7 Unlike Aesopic corpora and the many textual witnesses that preserve them, Babrius' fables rest on a very poor manuscript tradition: only three manuscripts have their text (and not even the alleged complete collection by the author, as far as we can establish), while the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* can be considered an important indirect witness, preserving the paraphrases of some fables by Babrius that would otherwise be completely lost. The latest critical edition of Babrius' fables is Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, but the edition by Perry 1965 is still important (although the two editions have a different treatment of some fables and the prologues).

8 For the life and works of Ignatios the Deacon, we have an important yet somewhat obscure Byzantine witness: an entry dedicated to him in the *Suda* (ι 84 Adler). It says that Ignatios was a deacon and σκευοφύλαξ of the Great Church of Constantinople, metropolitan of Nicaea, and a teacher (γραμματικός), and that he wrote some prose works and poems. The entry fails to mention many works that in the manuscript tradition are attributed (most probably) to Ignatios; moreover, the *Suda* gives no precise chronology of his positions at Constantinople and Nicaea. Many scholars have discussed the meaning and genesis of the entry in the *Suda* on his life and works, see Krumbacher 1897, 716–720; Wolska-Conus 1970; Makris 1997, 3–22; Mango 1997, 3–18; Efthymiadis 1998, 38–46; Adrados 2000, 493–515; Pratsch 2000; Lauxtermann 2003/19, II 237–241; lastly, Scognamiglio 2022b, 479–481. I will thoroughly discuss other issues about the authorship and context of Ignatios in the critical edition of his dodecasyllabic works that I am currently preparing.

9 The Second Iconoclasm dates from 815 to 843 CE, the victory of the worshippers of icons. The struggle was not only a matter of religion, but also a political struggle between different parties (imperial and patriarchal) in Constantinople.

10 The most recent and only critical edition of his *Tetrasticha* is that of Müller 1897. My view is that some *Tetrasticha* are most probably Ignatios' genuine work (such as other dodecasyllabic

of manuscripts[11] demonstrates the wide survival of Ignatios' tetrastich fables, often as exercises, but also as allegorical expressions of advice and 'pieces of morality' to be recollected. His *Tetrasticha* are rewritings of Babrius' iambic fables, thus a transformation from verse to other verse. Not surprisingly, the main question at this point shall be: what is the difference, then, between Aesopic rewritings in the Aesopic corpora (such as the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, or the different 'arrangements' of the same fable), and Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* as rewritings? As I will show, Ignatios' authorial voice is stronger than in the anonymous rewritings of the other corpora, and his work is enriched with something innovative. Ignatios strives for well-balanced, not merely abridged fables. He is thus not only a 'chapter' of the reception of Aesopic fables in Byzantium, though an important one: he is also a witness to the fruitful meeting of poetry, the reuse of an ancient model, and reflection on the form of a genre, the Aesopic fable. His tetrastich fables can be considered a clear example of *metaphrasis*, the transformation a text underwent by means of rhetorical devices.

Since *metaphrasis* cannot simply be defined as a genre *tout court* — its definition is the subject of critical and scholarly discussion — we will see how the features of this process of transformation can lead to the quasi-definition of an autonomous type (in my view) of poetry, if not a 'genre' in its full sense. Or, at least, this is what I shall attempt.

3 A Genre that is not a genre?

In dealing with the link between ancient fable and other literary genres — to the extent that we have a precise definition of 'genre' in Antiquity and beyond — the important point to make is that, not unexpectedly, a *metaphrasis* (the Byzantine 'brother' of the ancient and late antique term *paraphrasis*) cannot be defined as a 'genre' *stricto sensu*: it refers to a technique, namely for school exercises[12] — or at

works: *Lazarus et dives*, *Versus in Adamum*, *Acrostichon alphabeticum*), whereas some others are later compositions added to Ignatios' corpus. For the *status quaestionis* concerning the *Tetrasticha*, see below, n. 23.

11 If we consider manuscripts up to the 16th century, the *Tetrasticha* are preserved in around fifty extant ones, in very different types of collections and anthologies. But if we also consider more recent manuscripts, the number of witnesses increases notably.

12 This is the definition by Lauxtermann 2003/19, II 225–228. However, it is not the only possible one: for example, on *metaphrasis* in a hagiographical context with Symeon "the Metaphrastes", see Resh 2015, 754, who remarks about Symeon's rewritings: "This success marked the appearance of

least to the 'final product' of this technique.[13] The *metaphrasis* as a technique may transform a text in length, syntax, vocabulary, style, and in its prose or verse form: the most common practices of *metaphrasis* are (a) αὔξησις (the addition of words), (b) substitution of words, and (c) subtraction of words, *breuitas*.

Speaking of *metaphrasis* as a process of rewriting a hypo-text in a different shape (prose or verse), or with a different purpose, is a demanding task. The concept raises the notions of 'genre', authoriality, literature as an original work of art, the presence of an author — a number of notions that are often questionable, especially in Byzantine literature. In this regard, as for the text that underwent a process of *metaphrasis*, a question may arise: is the final text (i.e. the result of a *metaphrasis*) an independent work of art, or is it merely dependent upon the hypo-text?[14] The concept is rather difficult to investigate. Yet the final text resulting from a process of *metaphrasis* is indeed a literary product, whether independent of its model or not. In a broader sense, then, the *metaphrasis* as the result of a process of 'metaphrasing' has its own features and can sometimes fit into one or more 'genres': this does not imply *sic et simpliciter* that *metaphrasis* is a 'genre', but rather suggests that it can be an independent literary product and so be perceived by the Byzantines — and by modern readers — as something more than the mere 'application of a technique'.

Ne multa, the question is whether the *metaphrasis* can be defined as a genre or not. I would rather say that the question is whether form or content can define the genre, at least in Byzantine literature: once again, a demanding, nearly pioneering task. It would not be implausible, I believe, to consider the *metaphrasis* to be something in-between the two concepts of form and content (and so, 'genre' in a modern sense). Likewise, with the sonnet — say, Shakespeare's or Foscolo's[15] —

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metaphrasis as a genre that dominated Byzantine hagiographical discourse from this point onward, involving a significant number of writers, scribes, illustrators, readers, and listeners", and (*ibid.*) "That is, the success of metaphrasis resided not only in its popularity, but also in the high appreciation that it enjoyed among the learned rhetoricians [...]" (the discussion is focused on Symeon's 'metaphrastic corpus'). As with many aspects of Byzantine literature, the theoretical effort of producing a definition is clearly far from establishing a definitive truth. On *metaphrasis*, see also Roberts 1985 and Constantinou/Høgel 2020, but there is much more work to do.

13 See once again Resh 2015, 756: "In Byzantine Greek, μετάφρασις designates specifically a translated text, not the process of translation in general". However, I believe that both perspectives should be considered in the discussion of *metaphrasis* and Byzantine poetry.

14 The answer to this question can be given according to each single case study. In a broader sense and without any 'aesthetic limit', any creation can be defined as an original work of art and literature.

15 I am no expert in the field, and I know that the origin of the sonnet is a large subject, but I think that the example here, *mutatis mutandis*, fits our case.

it is clearly a metrical form, yet no one would ever think that Shakespeare or Foscolo could have written, for instance, epic or historical poetry in the form of the sonnet. Hardly anyone, I believe, would perceive the term 'sonnet' merely as a form of poetry: the 'sonnet' is a type (a 'genre'?) of poetry with certain defined contents. The form (sonnet as four stanzas) is directly connected to the content (sonnet as specific type of poetry). I wonder whether the malleable connection between metrical form and specific content can be ontologically considered as 'genre'. Thus, I believe it would not be entirely wrong to speak of the *metaphrasis* as 'quasi-genre': a sonnet can be defined by its form and *also* by content more or less ascribable to a 'genre', just as the *metaphrasis*, therefore, can be.

But let us move from the theoretical discussion of the genre and let us now focus on the practical outcome of this process in Ignatios' fables. As for Ignatios, however, we can say that his *metaphrasis* of Babrius is not only the result of the rhetorical process mentioned above,[16] but a work into which the author has put something new, in either form, style, content, or language. Whatever Ignatios' intention was and whatever our idea of *metaphrasis* is, it is true that his *Tetrasticha* were transmitted not as part of Aesopic corpora and not mixed with other Aesopic materials, even if strictly linked to Babrius' name:[17] for the manuscript tradition, the work of Ignatios was independent enough from his Babrian hypotext, and capable of being an independent collection of (rewritten) fables.

What are the objects, then, and which texts underwent transformation? As has rightly been pointed out,[18] the genre of the Aesopic fable is one of the most

16 It is interesting to note what happens in the manuscripts as regards the title of Ignatios' collection. In most of them, the fables are described as "tetrastichs from the original Gabrias/Babrius" (the name of Babrius was often mistaken), but in some manuscripts the fables are defined as τετράστιχα [...] μεταφρασθέντα καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐπαλείφοντα ("tetrastichs [...] metaphrased and set for virtue"). They are not defined precisely as a *metaphrasis* (except in one manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, E 64 sup., of the 15th century, ἰγνατίου διακόνου τετράστιχα δι᾽ ἰάμβων εἰς τοὺς μύθους τοὺς αἰσωπικοὺς μεταφραστικοὺς), also because the very concept of *metaphrasis* arose later. Yet we find a rising awareness of that process of transformation and of its literary outcomes.

17 In the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, Babrius' name (or corruptions of it, such as Gabrias, Fabrias ...) appears in a great number of witnesses together with that of Ignatios himself, so it sometimes happens that the only remaining name is Babrius and not Ignatios (titles very often suffer corruption). The ultimate example of the 'strong presence' of Babrius' name in titles of the *Tetrasticha* is given by the Aldine edition (printed in Venice in 1505): in that edition, the *Tetrasticha* were attributed to a certain 'Gabrias' (i.e. Babrius).

18 Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 225–229, esp. 229: "No literary genre lends itself more to metaphrasis than the fable, a genre that is in a constant process of transformation, from prose to verse and back again [...]".

significant (and suitable) examples of *metaphrasis* in Byzantium, since *metaphrasis* is a typical school exercise. And there is no better school exercise than a *metaphrasis* of a school text itself, such as the Aesopic fables.

In this sense, another point about Ignatios' poetry has to be made: if the *metaphrasis* of Aesopic fables is the school exercise *par excellence*, Ignatios goes a step further in composing fables that are not simply school exercises themselves. Ignatios has written something, the *Tetrasticha*, that can *also* be meant as *metaphrasis* and school exercise, yet the final result is a new collection of fables with its own features and style — and its own manuscript tradition.[19] The *Tetrasticha* are the above-mentioned 'quasi-genre'. Within the transformation there is also an original contribution by the author (in our case, Ignatios), besides the rhetorical technique. With the *Tetrasticha*, the 'genre' of the Aesopic fable matches the aim and technique of the Byzantine *metaphrasis*. Eventually, Ignatios' work as a final literary product can be labelled a *metaphrasis*, 'quasi-genre'.[20]

4 Long story short: fables in four lines

Ignatios followed the common trend of rewriting Aesopic fables and using them mainly as school exercises, yet he had the brilliant idea of writing them in only four lines, as the title *Tetrasticha* makes clear. The tetrastichic form of poetry (i.e. poems in four lines) was most probably nothing odd to Byzantine taste,[21] yet Igna-

19 There were other genres that were part of rhetorical studies, especially in Late Antiquity: *ethopoiiae*, *chreiai*, proverbs, and so on. They were all *progymnasmata*, preliminary rhetorical exercises very popular in Late Antiquity: important contributions on this subject are, for example, Cribiore 1996 and 2001 (esp. 221–230 for the *progymnasmata*), for Graeco-Roman Egypt.

20 A further insight in this complicated analysis of the *metaphrasis* as technique or genre or product: it is not by chance, in my opinion, that some other poems by Ignatios can be defined more or less as *metaphrasis* (as final product, or just 'metaphrased' poems): this is true of *Lazarus et dives*, a 70-line poem concerning the tale of Lazarus and the rich man from the *Gospel of Luke*, a prose parable that Ignatios rewrites in verse (dodecasyllables). The *Versus in Adamum*, another poem by Ignatios concerning the original sin in *Genesis*, can be considered a *metaphrasis* (from prose to verse, a poetic rewriting), but some other features suggest other ideas (for example: a *dramation*?). The issue both of 'genres' in Byzantium and of 'genres' in Ignatios' œuvre is clearly still a *uexata quaestio*.

21 It occurs, for example, in John Mauropous, Theodore Prodromos, and Manuel Philes, though they are later than Ignatios.

tios' collection of fables is the first one composed *exclusively* of tetrastichs,[22] and his fables in four lines display, in some cases, a keen ability to shorten a model without trivializing it. Ignatios' skill is twofold: not only does he 'metaphrase' Babrian verses with a literary and not just didactic purpose, but he also chooses the difficult form of four lines to rewrite fables that are sometimes very long in their original form.

The work of Ignatios was much appreciated, so even later poets imitated his tetrastich fables: in fact, in the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, there are some fables that, although inspired by Ignatios and his quatrains, are indeed later.[23] In any case, rewriting in verse was a common practice in Byzantium: no wonder, then, that there are some (late) verse fables in the Aesopic corpora as well.[24]

In comparison to other Byzantine verse fables, Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* display some unique features: besides the four lines, their metrical *facies* is correct,[25] and

22 To the best of my knowledge, this is true of the first period of Byzantine literature. Ignatios' choice can be appreciated even more in this light. A precise study of the evolution of the tetrastich form in Late Antique and Byzantine poetry is still lacking, but there are some clues to why the four-line form (or a multiple of four) was appealing as poetry. For example, even Babrius wrote some fables with the recurring number of four or eight or twelve lines. The path of the tetrastich form in Greek poetry is something that needs deep but careful investigation. A certain taste for a 'four-line poetry' can be found in the epigrams of the *Anthologia Palatina*. I cannot be certain that the path of the tetrastich poetry in Byzantine times led from that specific source, but it is extremely likely: tetrastichic poetry would be a 'new side' of the epigrams. Yet the question badly needs a more in-depth investigation. For Hellenistic epigrams and the *Anthologia Palatina*, see for example Gutzwiller 1998 and Cameron 1993.

23 The division into 'genuine' and 'later' (i.e. spurious) Ignatian fables was first made by Müller in his critical edition, dividing the fables into two sections. Most recently, Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 232–234, has stated that all the fables under the name of Ignatios (or corruptions of his name) should be divided into three groups for metrical and stylistic reasons (with which I absolutely agree): the first group, the original ones, is 1.1–45 (in Müller's numbering); the second group, the "spurious but prosodic", is 1.46–57 and 2.1–17, 28; and the third group, 2.18–27, 29–32, is the spurious and "unprosodic". Moreover, this three-way division is strongly supported by the manuscript tradition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*, as I have discovered and as I will show in the critical edition.

24 The so-called *recensio Vindobonensis* (thus Hausrath 1959/1970, xi–xiii; this is the second *classis* according to Chambry 1925/1926, 10–12; see also Perry 1936, 185–190, and Adrados 2000, 429–462) preserves many fables rewritten in Byzantine verses, sometimes attested only in single manuscripts (*codices unici*). This is also true of the *recensio mixta* (the fifth *classis* according to Chambry 1925/1926, 19–24). In those cases, the verse fables appear to be precise rewritings of previous fables, not independent of the model — unlike Ignatios' more original work. For anonymous Byzantine fables, see also Adrados 2000, 472–492.

25 Ignatios' verses are consistent with the 'rules' of the dodecasyllable of his time: paroxytonism, isosyllabism, and (in most cases) isometry. To be brief, in the time of Ignatios (8th–9th centuries) skilled poets (i.e. the 'classicizing' ones) were able to write dodecasyllables with prosodic accura-

the choices in rewriting are not simply done in order to shorten the Babrian model. The division into four lines reveals an internal structure of the tale. It can be outlined as:

1. introduction,
2. breakpoint,
3. turning point,
4. the end.[26]

Some questions may arise: what happens to a fable when it is transformed from several lines to only four? Is its internal message clear enough, at the end of such a 'metaphrastic process'? Or what happens to the style and vocabulary of Babrius, in Ignatios' *metaphrasis*?

The three following examples[27] will show how Ignatios managed to write fables with their own literary character, even while cleverly imitating Babrius. Ignatios did not simply summarize the fables or cut what was unnecessary — and even in that case, reducing several lines to just four without losing any important narrative feature would be challenging enough. Reading Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*,[28]

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cy, according to ancient rules of prosody, demonstrating their ability to still 'feel' syllabic quantity. On Byzantine metrics, the most important and up to date study is that of Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 265–383, 'Appendix metrica'. Though not among the most gifted poets of Byzantine literature (gifted poets as Christopher of Mytilene, John Mauropous, Theodore Prodromos, and Nicetas Eugenianos) according to several scholars, Ignatios the Deacon nonetheless fits into the legacy of the learned poetry of his era, and his verses can be considered 'correct' — however that is defined — in metre, rhythm, and syntax. The later Byzantine verse fables attested in Aesopic corpora are less accurate in metre, prosody, and style, which is one of the main differences between them and Ignatios' fables.

26 The 'internal structure' divided into four lines is also supported by the isometry, the Byzantine 'rule' in poetry of "full correspondence between form and content" (Lauxtermann 2003/2019, II 350), which derives from the aim to give full information (when possible) in each line: this criterion holds true for some fables by Ignatios, though not for all. I will discuss this topic in the *Prolegomena* to my critical edition.

27 I have chosen fables only from the group of 'original' tetrastichs by Ignatios, nos. 1.1–45 (see above, n. 21).

28 I am well aware that all the remarks on Ignatios' *Tetrasticha* are something of a *hysteron proteron*, since the text we will analyse in detail in the next paragraphs is still that of the latest edition (Müller 1897, but see below), unless otherwise indicated. The reader may rightly argue that reflections based on an 'old' text may mislead without a modern, complete critical apparatus. However, in this paper I have chosen fables whose text is more or less 'certain', even in its corruptions, as we will see. Some technical and literary features (such as rearrangement of lines or precise lexical choices or structural changes) can be easily recognized and outlined, even while a critical edition is in progress and before its completion.

we find that there is some technique in rewriting, not by mere substitution or subtraction of words: Ignatios' work cannot be labelled a 'mechanical' exercise, an arithmetical reduction of lines and words in a brief re-arrangement of a previous text. There are three recurring patterns (or devices) in the process of transforming (i.e. 'metaphrasing') Babrius' fables into a new tetrastich fable:[29] the striking ending, the pursuit of narrative *breuitas*, and the total line-to-line reshaping.[30]

4.1 *Fulmen in clausula*: the fox, the crow, and the cheese

(Ignat. Diac. 1.15 ~ Babr. 77; see Aesop. 124 P. [= 126 Hsr.; 166 Ch.])

In a short tale, every part (and every line) has its own importance and meaning. But in a moral tale, such as a fable, the moral message is an important feature, usually given at the end of the fable as a revealed universal truth that the reader grasps while reading the fable: in this way, the ending can easily become a 'striking ending'.[31] This is something that happens very often in fables, either in prose or in verse, since the solution or moral must be clear at the end of the story. In Ignatios this is even more evident, as the following example shows: a crow takes a piece of cheese, and the fox wants to eat it as well. So the fox deceives the crow with a lot of fake and fancy compliments in order to get the cheese, and successfully.[32]

Κόραξ δεδηχὼς στόματι τυρὸν εἱστήκει·
τυροῦ δ' ἀλώπηξ ἱχανῶσα κερδῴη
μύθῳ τὸν ὄρνιν ἠπάτησε τοιούτῳ·
"κόραξ, καλαί σοι πτέρυγες, ὀξέη γλήνη,
θεητὸς αὐχήν· στέρνον αἰετοῦ φαίνεις,
ὄνυξι πάντων θηρίων κατισχύεις.

29 The three patterns that I will discuss are not the only ones, and they are not strictly independent: sometimes the different patterns (or rhetorical devices) are used together to obtain an effective line, or a vibrant ending, or a precise narration. The three patterns mentioned above are the most significant, and most easily identifiable.

30 For each fable by Ignatios or Babrius quoted here, the corresponding tale in the Aesopic corpora is also cited.

31 The moral in Babrius, Ignatios' model, is a rather difficult issue: we are not sure whether the *epimythia* are original or not; if not, then the 'striking ending' ought to be found not only in the *epimythia*, but also in the last lines of the poem. On the *epimythia*, see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, xci–xcvii, and Holzberg 2019, 13–17.

32 All translations of Ignatios here are mine, whereas for Babrius I use the translation of Perry 1965, sometimes slightly modified. The fable from the Aesopic corpus (printed below) is also translated by me.

Ὁ τοῖος ὄρνις κωφός ἐσσι κοὐ κρώζεις.”
Κόραξ δ’ ἐπαίνῳ καρδίην ἐχαυνώθη,
στόματος δὲ τυρὸν ἐκβαλὼν ἐκεκράγει.
Τὸν ἡ σοφὴ λαβοῦσα κερτόμῳ γλώσσῃ
“οὐκ ἦσθ’ ἄφωνος” εἶπεν “ἀλλὰ φωνήεις·
ἔχεις, κόραξ, ἅπαντα, νοῦς δέ σοι λείπει.”
(Babr. 77)

A crow, holding in his mouth a piece of cheese, stood perched aloft. A crafty fox who hankered for the cheese deceived the bird with words to this effect: “Sir Crow, thy wings are beautiful, bright and keen thine eye, thy neck a wonder to behold. An eagle’s breast thou dost display, and with thy talons over all the beasts thou canst prevail. So great a bird thou art; yet mute, alas, and without utterance.” On hearing this flattery the crow’s heart was puffed up with conceit, and, dropping the cheese from his mouth, he loudly screamed: “Caw! Caw!” The clever fox pounced on the cheese and tauntingly remarked: “You were not dumb, it seems, you have indeed a voice; you have everything, Sir Crow, except brains.”
(Transl. Perry)

Τυρὸν κόραξ ἔδακνε, κερδὼ δ’ ἡπάτα
“εἰ γλῶσσαν εἶχες, Ζηνὸς ἦς ὄρνις μέγας.”
ὁ νήπιος δ’ ἔκραζεν, ἡ δ’ εἶλεν †τυρόν.
“ἔχεις, κόραξ, ἅπαντα, νοῦν κτῆσαι δ’ ” ἔφη.

Ἐχθρῶν ἐπαίνοις μὴ πιστεύειν.
(Ignat. Diac. 1.15)

A crow bit a piece of cheese, and the sly <fox> deceived him: “Had you a tongue, you would be Zeus’ great bird!” The foolish one cawed, and she took † the cheese. “Crow,” she said, “you have everything, but you should acquire brains.”

Do not trust enemies’ praises.
(Transl. F.S.)

As we can clearly see, the fable by Babrius is longer than the Ignatian one, yet the tetrastich has everything needed to understand the fable, and it seems that Ignatios stressed its moral message. In fact, as we have said, every line of the tetrastich has a precise function: every fable has four major moments (introduction, *actio*, *reactio*, and conclusion), and in the tetrastich every line contains one of these moments. The first line is a presentation of the actors of the story (the crow, the fox, a piece of cheese), and, if possible, with verbs or other details of their distinctive characteristics; the second line is the breakpoint of the story (the dishonest and unkind compliment); the third line is the turning point, turning towards the end and the resolution (the fox takes the piece of cheese); finally, the fourth and last line is the striking ending, often given in direct speech, to make it sharper and more effective (the fox

taunts the crow). Comparing the two fables, Ignatios' story's division into four parts is evident, as is the fact that he quotes only the essentials. The four lines of fancy compliments in Babrius (4–7) are summarized in one line in Ignatios (2), but with mention of none other than Zeus himself: the one-line compliment in Ignatios' fable finds room for (and even needs) a hyperbole. In the third line, something happens all of a sudden:[33] the crow drops his precious piece of cheese and the famished (and deceitful) fox takes it. Finally, the *fulmen in clausula*: Ignatios writes almost along the same lines as Babrius — the first hemistich is, in fact, identical — and the strong juxtaposition makes the unpleasant compliment ("you have everything but brains") clear. Only in the epimythium following the tetrastichs does Ignatios warn against trusting the flattery (however effective) of enemies; whereas in the fourth line of the fable he chose to stick to the model and kept the effective direct speech. The example of the fox and the crow with the cheese shows how important it is that the final words be striking, especially with only four lines available.

4.2 Pursuit of *breuitas*: the jackdaw and the fake plumage

(Ignat. Diac. 1.29 ~ Babr. 72; see Aesop. 101 P. [= 103 Hsr.; 163 Ch.])

Although summarizing is neither the main purpose nor the most brilliant technique of Ignatios in rewriting Babrian fables, it is undeniably an important part of his process of *metaphrasis*, as illustrated in our second example.

Ἶρίς ποτ' οὐρανοῖο πορφυρῆ κῆρυξ
πτηνοῖσι κάλλους εἶπεν ἐν θεῶν οἴκοις
ἀγῶνα κεῖσθαι· πᾶσι δ' εὐθὺς ἠκούσθη,
καὶ πάντα θείων ἔσχεν ἵμερος δώρων.
Ἔσταζε πέτρης αἰγὶ δυσβάτου κρήνη,
ὕδωρ τε θερινὸν καὶ διαυγὲς εἱστήκει·
πάντων τ' ἐπ' αὐτὸ φῦλον ἦλθεν ὀρνίθων,
πρόσωπα δ' αὐτῶν ἐξέλουε καὶ κνήμας,
ἔσειε ταρσούς, ἐκτένιζε τὰς χαίτας.
Ἦλθεν δ' ἐκείνην καὶ κολοιὸς εἰς κρήνην,
γέρων κορώνης υἱός· ἄλλο δ' ἐξ ἄλλου

33 The third line is very problematic. Müller printed it with a *crux* (since the line-ending is certainly wrong), but it is reasonable to think that: 1. the original text was not very different, and perhaps we should change only the last word; and 2. even if the original word is lost, the surviving readings (for example, a line rewritten as κόραξ δὲ ῥίπτει τυρὸν ἢ δ' εἶλεν τάχος, or even χαίνει κόραξ· πίπει τυρός· κερδὼ δ' ἔφη) in the different manuscripts show us what happened in that line.

πτερὸν καθύγρων ἐντὸς ἁρμόσας ὤμων
μόνος τὰ πάντων ποικίλως ἐκοσμήθη,
καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς ἤιξεν αἰετοῦ κρείσσων.
Ὁ Ζεὺς δ' ἐθάμβει, καὶ παρεῖχε τὴν νίκην
εἰ μὴ χελιδὼν αὐτὸν ὡς Ἀθηναίη
ἤλεγξεν ἑλκύσασα τὸ πτερὸν πρώτη.
Ὁ δ' εἶπεν αὐτῇ· "μή με συκοφαντήσῃς."
Τὸν δ' ἄρα τρυγὼν ἐσπάραττε καὶ κίχλη
καὶ κίσσα καὶ κορυδαλλὸς οὐν τάφοις παίζων,
χὠ νηπίων ἔφεδρος ὀρνέων ἴρηξ,
τά τ' ἄλλ' ὁμοίως, καὶ κολοιὸς ἐγνώσθη.
Ὦ παῖ, σεαυτὸν κόσμον ἴδιον κόσμει·
ἀλλοτρίοις γὰρ ἐμπρέπων στερηθήσῃ.
(Babr. 72)

Once Iris, heaven's bright-hued royal messenger, proclaimed a contest in beauty for the feathered tribe, to be held amid the dwellings of the gods. The news at once was heard by all, and every bird was filled with yearning for the prize forthcoming from the gods. There was a spring dripping from a rocky cliff that scarce a goat could tread, and there the water in a pool stood summer-like and clear. Thither birds of every kind now came, to wash their feathers and to comb their crests. Among them to that fountain came a jackdaw, an old fellow, the son of a crow. Taking one cast-off feather from one bird and another from another, he fitted them to his wet shoulders, and thus having plumed himself variously with all their feathers, he darted off to the gods more impressive than an eagle. Zeus marvelled and was on the point of giving him the victory, had not the swallow, like the true Athenian that she was, confuted him by being the first to pull out her own feather. In vain the jackdaw said to her: "Don't show me up!" The turtle-dove clawed him viciously, so too the thrush, and the jay, and the lark who plays about the tombstones, and the hawk who lies in wait for fledgling birds, and likewise all the others. So came the jackdaw to be known for what he was.
Deck yourself out in fine clothes of your own, my boy; if you parade in finery that belongs to others, you'll be stripped of it.

(Transl. after Perry, modified)

Ἀλλοτρίοις πτεροῖσιν ἡμφιεσμένος,
ηὔχει κολοιὸς ὀρνέων ὑπερφέρειν.
Πρώτη δὲ δῶρον ἡ χελιδὼν ἡρπάκει,
μεθ' ἣν ἅπαντες· εἶτα γυμνὸς εὑρέθη.

Τὸ ἐξ ἐράνου θράσος αἴσχει διαλύεται.
(Ignat. Diac. 1.29)

Once he was clothed with others' feathers, the jackdaw was confident that he would surpass all birds. But the swallow first took off the gift, and after her everyone else: then, he [the jackdaw] was naked.

The arrogance from a loan is dissolved by shame.
(Transl. F.S.)

We can see that the hypo-text by Babrius is far longer than the tetrastichic one by Ignatios. In Babrius, the backstory of the birds' contest proclaimed by the gods occupies the first nine lines. Then, the jackdaw steals other birds' feathers, but he is caught out by the swallow first, and then by other birds. In Ignatios, we find only the essentials, yet with smart hints towards the longer text.

Regarding *breuitas* and the 'rule' of putting all the information in the smallest possible space, it is interesting that the first line consists of only three words, a 'three-word trimeter' — or, here, a three-word dodecasyllable.[34] Although the contest is absent in Ignatios' tetrastich, we can imagine it: in line 2, the jackdaw is confident of surpassing (ὑπερφέρειν) all other birds with the stolen feathers, and this evokes the contest even without mentioning it.[35] Further, a 'gift' is mentioned in both texts, albeit with slightly different meanings and at different moments of the story. The list of birds is shortened, but the swallow, the one who brings justice in this fable, is still mentioned in Ignatios. By the end, just three words clearly sum up the ending of the story.

4.3 Rephrasing line-to-line: the cat and the sick bird

(Ignat. Diac. 1.16 ~ Babr. 121; see Aesop. 7 P. [= Hsr.; 14 Ch.])

The last characteristic is rewriting almost anew, according to Ignatios' own 'taste'. This is the case in an intensive rephrasing, and, we should note, the case in which Ignatios introduces something new, i.e. a distinctive detail at the end. In our third example, the fable in Babrius and Ignatios is the same, but the outlook is different.[36]

34 On three-word trimeters, their definition and use (and their diffusion in some Byzantine poets), see Marcovich 1984, esp. in the appendix (200–211) on Byzantine authors. The feature is common in ancient trimeters, and also in Late Antique and Byzantine dodecasyllables, though a deeper investigation is badly needed. In this case, it is all the more impressive that Ignatios chose to write a three-word dodecasyllable (a difficult verse) within the already difficult structure of four lines.

35 We assume that an ideal reader of Ignatios' fables would not have had to read Babrius' fables (or other Aesopic fables) to understand Ignatios' short tetrastichs. I believe that the main theme would have been clear to a reader who knew which fable he was reading. Yet it is an important question still to be discussed thoroughly. I will address it in the *Prolegomena* of my critical edition of Ignatios' *Tetrasticha*.

36 The fable by Babrius is four lines long, since one line (which I print in square brackets) must be deleted as spurious: see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986 *ad loc*. The spurious line is attested only in the *tabulae ceratae Assendelftianae*, a Late Antique witness to Babrius (see Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, xxx), whereas the Medieval tradition of Babrius (the ms. Athous Mus. Brit. Addit. 22087, see Luzzatto/La

Ὄρνις ποτ' ἠσθένησε. Τῇ δὲ προσκύψας
αἴλουρος εἶπε· "Πῶς ἔχεις; Τίνων χρῄζεις;
ἐγὼ παρέξω πάντα σοι· μόνον σῴζου."
[ἡ δ' ὄρνις εἶπεν μῦθον ἄξιον γνώμης·]
Ἡ δ' "ἢν ἀπέλθῃς", εἶπεν, "οὐκ ἀποθνῄσκω."
(Babr. 121)

A hen once fell sick. A cat bent over her and said: "How are you getting along? What do you need? I'll get you anything you want. Only take care of yourself and don't die." Said the hen: "If you'll just go away from here, I won't die."

(Transl. Perry)

Κάμνουσαν ὄρνιν εἶδεν αἴλουρος νόσῳ.
πρὸς ἣν ἔφησε "Πῶς ἔχεις τὰ τῆς νόσου;"
Τρέμουσα δ' εἶπεν "εἰ παρέλθοις μακρόθεν,
ζωὴν ὑπέλθω δορκάδων ὑπερτέραν."

Φυλάττεσθαι πολεμίων ὑπόκρισιν.
(Ignat. Diac. 1.16)

A cat saw a bird who was sick, and told her: "How about your illness?" The frightened bird then said: "If you pass by keeping your distance, I will have a life longer than that of deer."

Beware of enemies' hypocrisy.

(Transl. F.S.)

In Babrius, we find a bird and then a cat, in Ignatios instead there is a cat looking at a bird — it may seem a very slight difference, but Ignatios has tried to be brief and perhaps to give more details in less space. The most effective part of this rewriting is the answer of the bird in Ignatios' tetrastich. While in Babrius we have the bird saying "if you leave, I won't die" in just one line, in Ignatios' fable the answer merits a line and a half, and, above all, the bird says something that is not traceable in Babrius: "I will have a life longer than that of deer." Ignatios did not simply paraphrase and rephrase the Babrian half-line "I do not die" (οὐκ ἀποθνῄσκω): the brilliant and 'new' image of deer and their long life represents the personal addition of Ignatios from his own cultural heritage — an image that may have been common in Late Antique and Byzantine outlines of that animal.[37]

Penna 1986, xxiii–xxv) has the fable in only four lines. It is most likely that Ignatios read Babrius' fable in the four-line form attested in the Medieval tradition.

37 This image seems to be borrowed from the *Physiologus* (or, better: from the Greek version of the text), an anthology of moral outlines of animals (the snake, the deer, the swallow, and so on) and descriptions of their behaviour, often with allegorical hints. Sometimes the descriptions are

But we can go a step further. The work of Ignatios is precise, and quite different from another Byzantine (and later) rewriting of the same fable:[38]

Ὄρνις δέ ποτε κατακλιθεὶς ἠρρώστει·
εἰς ὃν αἴλουρος προκύψας ἔφη ταῦτα·
“Πῶς ἔχεις, φίλε; τί δέ σοι ἂν τι χρῄζῃς,
ἀνάγγελιόν μοι καὶ πάντα σοι παρέξω.
Ὅμως ἔγειρε, καὶ τεύξῃ τῆς ὑγείας.” 5
Ἡ δ’ ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς τὸν αἴλουρον ταῦτα·
“Εἰ σὺ παρέλθῃς, ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀποθνήσκω·
ζωὴν γὰρ ζήσω δορκάδος ὑπερτέραν.”

Τοὺς δολίους ὑποκριτάς, τοὺς λέγοντας φιλεῖν, ὁ μῦθος ἐλέγχει.
(Aesop. 14 Ch. aliter [recensio Vindobonensis])

Once a bird was lying down and was sick; a cat pointing at him said these words: “How are you, dear? Whatever can be useful to you, tell me and I will provide for you. Nonetheless wake up, and you will recover.” But the bird replied to the cat: “If you pass by, I do not die: in fact, I will live a life longer than that of deer.”

The fable refutes the deceitful pretenders who claim to love.

(Transl. F.S.)

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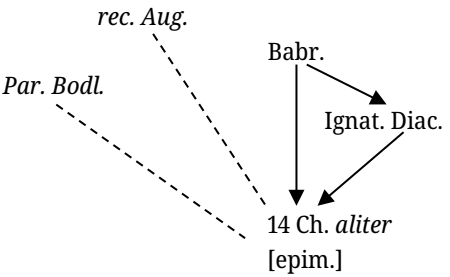
enriched by quotations from the *Septuaginta* or the *NT*; more often, the description of the animal and its behaviour serves the exegesis of biblical references and quotations. The edition of the *Physiologus* is still that of Sbordone 1936: its text has been transmitted in three versions (*redactio prima*, *redactio Byzantina*, and *redactio pseudo-Basiliana*). For the image of the deer, the *Physiologus* is a likely source (to the best of my knowledge), in the chapter on deer and snakes, 2.4 (i.e. in the *redactio Byzantina*): οὗτος μὲν ζῇ ἔτη πεντήκοντα [...] διὰ τοῦτο ἔλαφος ὀνομάζεται, διὰ τὸ ἐλεῖν τοὺς ὄφεις ἐκ βάθους. λαβὼν δὲ τὸν ὄφιν, τρέχει εἰς τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων· ἐὰν γὰρ διὰ τριῶν ὡρῶν ἀφ’ οὗ τὸν ὄφιν λάβῃ οὐ πίῃ ὕδωρ, τελευτᾷ, εἰ δὴ πίῃ ὕδωρ, ζήσεται ἄλλα πεντήκοντα ἔτη (“It [*scil.* the deer] lives for fifty years [...] Which is why the deer is so called, because it catches the snakes from the depths. When it catches the snake, it runs to the streams of water: in fact, during the three seasons after which the deer catches the snake, if the deer does not drink the water, it dies, but if it drinks the water, it will live for another fifty years”). The long life of deer was not unknown to Ancient Greek literature; see for example Hes. *fr*. 304.1–2 Merkelbach-West: ἐννέα τοι ζώει γενεὰς λακέρυζα κορώνη | ἀνδρῶν ἡβώντων· ἔλαφος δέ τε τετρακόρωνος (“the cowing crow lives for nine generations | of adult men; but the deer has four times the life of the crow”). Yet for a Byzantine author writing of animals and their (more or less realistic) features, the most likely source was indeed the *Physiologus*.

38 Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter* in dodecasyllables belongs to the second *recensio* (the so called *Vindobonensis*), in which a lot of late verse fables are preserved. Incidentally, the fable is attested also in manuscripts of the fifth *recensio* (the *recensio mixta*). The same tale but with some different stylistic features is also found in the *recensio Augustana* and in the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* (i.e. the prose paraphrase of Babrius). I will not discuss the ‘metrical features’ of this later version thoroughly: it differs from Ignatios, and the ‘rules’ of a learned dodecasyllable are not always respected.

This anonymous verse fable can be considered a rewriting of the Babrian one as well, yet it also recalls the structure of the fable in the *recensio Augustana*. Although the phrasing is very similar to that of Babrius in being very barebones, the cat here pretends to be a doctor: in fact, the cat speaks about recovery (καὶ τεύξῃ τῆς ὑγείας), as happens *only* in the *Augustana*.[39] But, finally, the epimythium given in this late version sticks to what the epimythium of the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* of this Babrian fable says.[40] The anonymous fable thus 'mixes' the *Augustana* (the mention of the recovery) together with the elements of the Babrian fable (the beginning of 14 Ch. *aliter*: ὄρνις δέ ποτε ~ Babr. 121: ὄρνις ποτ', or the use of direct speech, asking whether the bird is fine or not) and its paraphrase (the epimythium similar to the one in the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*), and finally with Ignatios by mentioning the deer and their long life (almost a quotation, 14 Ch. *aliter*: ζωὴν γὰρ ζήσω δορκάδος ὑπερτέραν ~ Ignat. Diac.: 1.16: ζωὴν ὑπέλθω δορκάδων ὑπερτέραν). It may be difficult to reconstruct the exact process of imitation and tell who is the imitator, who the model, but it seems most likely that influences developed in this way:



The 'contamination process' beneath the text of the anonymous fable Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter*, together with its stylistic and metrical features,[41] proves that it is a late

39 Aesop. 7 P. [= Hsr., 14 Ch.]: […] σχηματίσας ἑαυτὸν εἰς ἰατρὸν καὶ τὰ τῆς ἐπιστήμης πρόσφορα ἀναλαβὼν ἐργαλεῖα […] ("disguising itself [*scil.* the cat] as a doctor and taking the tools relevant to the science […]").

40 The epimythium reads (Chambry 1925/1926, 57): [Ὅτι] ὑποκριτὰς δολίους φιλεῖν λέγοντας ὁ μῦθος ἐλέγχει ("the fable puts to shame the deceitful hypocrites who claim to love"). We may suppose that the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, late as it may be, was written before the later Byzantine *recensiones* of Aesopic fables: in that case, it is most likely that a late rewriting (such as this one from the *recensio Vindobonensis*) may have borrowed from both the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana* and the *Augustana*, rather than being a model for the *Paraphrasis* (let alone for the *Augustana*!).

41 As well as the mere rearrangement, as a juxtaposition of previous sources and their phrasing, the anonymous fable also has metrical features (let us say, metrical 'mistakes') that prove its

rewriting of the topic, later than Babrius, the *Paraphrasis Bodleiana*, and also later than Ignatios.[42] The late anonymous fable is clearly a mixture of different materials and different sources available to the writer, with no precise aim of being either brief, lengthy, or explanatory. This is notably different from what Ignatios did in his fable.

The example of the anonymous version from the *recensio Vindobonensis* is striking. The comparison, however, between Ignatios' tetrastich fable and the anonymous one, besides supporting the late chronology of the latter, proves *per differentiam* the skills and the personal contribution of Ignatios in (re)writing Babrius. Not only did Ignatios choose a specific author (not simply mixing Aesopic fables *tout court*) as main source and hypo-text for his rewritings, but he managed to write poetry with its own literary dimension, combining form, function, and content — a delight for learned eyes.

5 Conclusions: tetrastich poetry

Without setting precise boundaries of 'genres', Ignatios wrote his fables both as *metaphrasis* (i.e. the school exercise) and independent poetry (the 'quasi-genre') by using the form of the tetrastich. As regards their genesis, Ignatios' quatrains cannot just be defined as 'fables': they are *metaphrased* fables. Moreover, as regards their literary status, they cannot be labelled simply 'metaphrased fables': they are a *poetic metaphrasis* of fables.

Had Ignatios not chosen the tetrastich form with all its features, his fables would probably have been *only* school exercises, or been similar to the later anonymous fables that were quite common in Byzantine anthologies of Aesopic materials, as is commonly known and clearly demonstrated by the evidence of the manuscript tradition. But Ignatios *chose* the tetrastich form, its features, and its stylistic demands. The fables remain fables but their shape distinctly changes.

As for the connection between fables and other genres, Ignatios' fables elude precise definitions: the content is the fable, the form is tetrastich poetry, the origin is the process of *metaphrasis*, and the genre is a 'quasi-genre'. In this case, Ignatios

language to be later than that of Ignatios: there is no correct (or rather, 'classicizing') prosody in the lines of the anonymous versifier, unlike Ignatios' verses.

42 Moreover, it is interesting that the anonymous Aesop. 14 Ch. *aliter* used different sources, and not all of them were easily available — for example, Babrius' fables. It would be interesting to find out how the anonymous fables (such as those of the *recensio Vindobonensis*) quoted and re-elaborated their sources, and how they read them.

chose to stick to poetry, the ancient form of Babrius' collection: albeit in the didactic context of preliminary school exercises, Ignatios' fables *are poetry*. His collection cannot be labelled a 'collection of exercises' (incidentally, Aesopic fables): it is a corpus of refined, carefully produced short poems. The manuscript tradition, in this regard, teaches us an important lesson of *Textüberlieferung*: Ignatios' fables were copied as an autonomous collection of poetry, and they were *perceived* as such. It is useful to note that Ignatios' tetrastich fables have something in common with epigrams and their witty *breuitas*, and we may wonder whether the epigram as genre had some influence on the tetrastichs of Ignatios and later Byzantine poets. At any rate, epigrammatic wit seems to perfectly match the style of Aesopic fables, and the interaction between the two genres — epigram and Aesopic fable — may be pivotal to the definition of Ignatios' tetrastichs.[43]

It is certainly no coincidence that in the following centuries the tetrastich as a poetic form became increasingly popular in Byzantium (either tetrastichs alone or groups of four lines in a longer poem): the 'tetrastich aesthetic', so to speak, and its internal balance found an initial, though already well defined example in the early Byzantine period in Ignatios the Deacon, who transformed the ancient fables not as anonymous copyists might do, but as an author, *a poet*. His fables remain fables, but in the Byzantine manner.

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43 A thorough analysis of the origin of Ignatios' tetrastich and the interaction with other previous genres is badly needed: I aim to do so myself in the near future, while working on the critical edition.

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Part VII: **Fable and Christian Genres**

Maria P. Christodoulou

St. Gregory of Nazianzus and Fables: Between Epistles and Epigrams

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the impact of ancient fables on the Christian literature of the East, with special reference to Gregory of Nazianzus' epistolography and epigrams and the interplay of genres. In Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 114.2–5, there is a fabulistic dispute between swans and swallows. And one of Gregory's series of epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156–158), on Naucratius' death while fishing, is noteworthy and perhaps related to fable themes. A reference to several instances of burying a dead man (Gregory, *Anth. Pal.* 8.210) may be of the same spirit as a fable about a man rewarded for burying a dead body. Further, the smallness and preciousness of a pearl (μάργαρος) in Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.21 might be envisaged as the philosophical distinction between εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι, similarly treated in ancient fables. Finally, in *Anth. Pal.* 8.178, Gregory may be alluding to Aeschylus' *Ag.* 717–732.

1 Introduction: theoretical background

Like the taste of the madeleine in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ancient fables popped up and reminded me of my childhood readings as I was preparing my thesis on epigrams from the early Imperial period. While composing a commentary on Apollonides the epigrammatist, dating to the 1st century CE, I came upon μακαριστὸς Rodríguez Adrados' *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, which traced a couple of reminiscences of fables in Apollonides' epigrammatic corpus.[1] Other scholars connecting fables and epigrams, such as Silvia Mattiacci, Margot Neger, and Lukas Spielhofer, have inspired me to search for connections between these two genres.[2]

In this paper, I continue the survey that I published in 2020 on "Fables in Epigrams of the Greek Anthology" covering Greek epigrams of the Hellenistic and early Imperial period and their relationship with the Graeco-Latin fable.[3] Thus, I

1 "Λάρος καὶ ἰκτῖνος", or Aesop. 139 P. [= 144 Hsr.; 194 Ch.], and "Ἀετός" from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*, *fr.* 139 *TGF*; cf. Adrados 1999–2003.

2 See, for example, Mattiacci 2011 and the contributions by Neger and Spielhofer in this volume.

3 See Christodoulou 2020.

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investigate the existence of fable motifs and material in the corpus of Christian epistles and epigrams by Gregory of Nazianzus. It is widely agreed that Christian epigrams, at least those by Gregory of Nazianzus, have a strong relationship to ancient, though pagan, literary production.[4]

At least at first glance, book 1 of the *Greek Anthology*, the so-called "Τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν Ἐπιγράμματα" ("Christian Epigrams"), does not have any reminiscence of ancient fables. Interestingly, Rodríguez Adrados' *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* refers to Gregory of Nazianzus' *Epistle* 114 as a paradigm of the embedded fable. I hence decided to investigate this epistle and then to survey book 8 of the *Greek* or *Palatine Anthology*, entitled "Εκ τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου" ("Part of the poems of Saint Gregory the Theologian"). It has been observed that Gregory of Nazianzus' epigrams were the only genre in his poetry where he followed a purely Greek tradition.[5] This would suggest the use of ancient Greek themes in his epigrams. Therefore, I tended to search for fables or 'anti-fables' in Gregory's epistolography and epigrammatic corpus.[6] In parallel, I began to investigate the interplay of genres, in other words the question of what happens to a fable when it is incorporated into a letter or an epigram, and what effect the fable has on the other genre.

2 Gregory of Nazianzus, swans, and swallows: *Epistle* 114

My starting point is not an epigram but an epistle. This is not the only case of an epistle where fables are embedded or at least alluded to; this fact is connected to the rhetorical effect of fable material on epistolography.[7] The epistle goes as follows:

4 See Simelidis 2019, 636.

5 See Vertoudakis 2019, 625–626.

6 I take the term 'anti-fable' as suggested in Carnes 1992.

7 There are more examples of fables in Late Antique Greek and Latin epistolography: cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 334 beginning with Aesop. 322 P. [= Babr. 109] — "Καρκίνος καὶ μήτηρ" — to illustrate a scribe's tendency to write slantwise; cf. Antonopoulou 2019, 204–205; Horace, *Epist*. 1.1.73–75 (cf. Hopkinson 1994, 213–214); 1.3.18–20; 1.7.29–33; 1.10.34–41; 1.20.14–16; Fronto, *Ep*. 152 van den Hout.

Τῷ αὐτῷ (sc. Κελευσίῳ)

(1) Ἐπειδή μοι τὴν σιωπὴν ἐγκαλεῖς καὶ τὴν ἀγροικίαν, ὦ λάλε καὶ ἀστικέ, φέρε σοι διαμυθολογήσω μῦθον οὐκ ἄμουσον, εἴ πως, ἀλλὰ ταύτῃ γε, δυναίμην ἐπισχεῖν σε τῆς φλυαρίας. (2) Ἐπέσκωπτον αἱ χελιδόνες τῶν κύκνων τὸ μὴ ἐθέλειν ὁμιλεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μήτε δημοσιεύειν τὴν μουσικήν, ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ τοὺς λειμῶνας διάγειν καὶ τοὺς ποταμούς, καὶ τὴν ἐρημίαν ἀσπάζεσθαι, καὶ βραχέα μὲν ᾄδειν, ἃ δὲ καὶ ᾄδοιεν ᾄδειν ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς, ὥσπερ αἰσχυνομένους τὴν μουσικήν. (3) "Ἡμῶν δε, ἔφασαν, αἱ πόλεις καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ θάλαμοι, καὶ περιλαλοῦμεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα διηγούμεθα, ταῦτα δὴ τὰ ἀρχαῖα καὶ ἀττικά, τὸν Πανδίονα, τὰς Ἀθήνας, τὸν Τηρέα, τὴν Θρᾴκην, τὴν ἀποδημίαν, τὸ κῆδος, τὴν ὕβριν, τὴν ἐκτομήν, τὰ γράμματα, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τὸν Ἴτυν, καὶ ὡς ἐγενόμεθα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ὄρνιθες." (4) καὶ οἳ μόλις μὲν αὐτὰς ἠξίωσαν καὶ λόγου τῆς ἀδολεσχίας μισήσαντες, ἐπεὶ δὲ ἠξίωσαν· "Ἀλλ' ἡμῶν μὲν ἕνεκεν, ὦ αὗται, κἂν εἰς τὴν ἐρημίαν ἀφίκοιτό τις ὥστε ἀκοῦσαι τῆς μουσικῆς, ὅταν ἀνῶμεν τῷ Ζεφύρῳ τὰς πτέρυγας ἐμπνεῖν ἡδύ τι καὶ ἐναρμόνιον· ὥστ' εἰ μὴ πολλὰ καὶ ἐν πολλοῖς ᾄδομεν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο κάλλιστόν ἐστιν ἡμῶν ὅτι μέτρῳ φιλοσοφοῦμεν τὸ μέλος καὶ οὐκ ἀναμίγνυμεν θορύβοις τὴν μουσικήν. (5) Ὑμᾶς δὲ καὶ εἰσοικιζομένας οἱ ἄνθρωποι δυσχεραίνουσι καὶ ἀδούσας ἀποστρέφονται· καὶ μάλα ἐν δίκῃ, αἵ γε οὐδὲ ἐκτμηθεῖσαι τὴν γλῶτταν δύνασθε σιωπᾶν, ἀλλ' αὐταὶ τὴν ἀφωνίαν ὑμῶν ὀδυρόμεναι καὶ τὸ ἐφ' ὑμῖν πάθος, ἔπειτά ἐστε λαλίστεραι τίνος οὐχὶ τῶν εὐγλώττων καὶ μουσικῶν;" (6) Σύνες ὅ τοι λέγω, φησὶν ὁ Πίνδαρος, κἂν εὕρῃς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀφωνίαν ἀμείνω τῆς σῆς εὐγλωττίας, παῦσαι καταφλυαρῶν ἡμῶν τῆς σιωπῆς· ἃ σοι παροιμίαν ἐρῶ μάλα μὲν ἀληθῆ, μάλα δὲ σύντομον, ὅτι τότε ᾄσονται κύκνοι ὅταν κολοιοὶ σιωπήσωσιν.

(Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 114 Gallay)

To Celeusius.

(1) Since you prosecute my quietude and rusticity, you chatty and sophisticated man, come and let me tell you a not unrefined fable, if I could somehow hold you back from prattling on about this, at least. (2) Swallows laughed at swans for not wanting to converse with humans and publicize their music, for instead spending their time around meadows and rivers, for embracing isolation, and for singing just a few notes while singing what they do sing among themselves, as if they're ashamed of their music. (3) "The cities, the human beings, and the bedrooms are ours," [the swallows] would say, "and we speak to humans and tell them our stories, these being indeed ancient and Attic: Pandion, Athens, Tereus, Thrace, the departure, the anxiety, the violence, the excision, the letters, and above all Itys, and how we became birds from humans." (4) And the swans thought little of the swallows, abhorring the glibness of their speech. When they deemed it right, they would say, "O Swallows, it's because of us that, when we allow our wings to blow something sweet and harmonious to the western wind, someone comes upon our isolated spot, that they may listen to our music. Therefore, not singing many songs and <not being> in the presence of the masses is best for us, because we treat each part of the song philosophically, with due measure, and we refrain from mixing our music with noise. (5) But human beings bring difficulties to you who dwell among them, and they turn away from your singing — and rightfully so, since you cannot cut out your own tongue to keep quiet! Don't you lament your dissonance and the suffering you've caused? Aren't you still noisier than good speakers and musicians?" (6) "Realize what I'm telling you," says Pindar <Pind. *fr.* 105a Maehler>, and if you find my voicelessness to be better than your sweet-sounding tongue, stop prating against my quietude, or I'll utter an especially true and especially concise proverb to you: the swans will sing their songs when the jackdaws keep quiet.

(Transl. Storin, slightly altered)

This epistle begins with a fable and ends with a παροιμία which Gregory saves for us. In terms of pragmatics, this is apparently the last of three epistles that he addressed to Celeusius the judge (*Ep.* 112–114). All three epistles are dated to 382 CE, during Easter Lent. Through all three letters, it can be assumed that Gregory must have accepted Celeusius into his house while keeping silent for Lent. The first two letters to Celeusius are short and appropriate to Gregory's programme of silence, after his retirement from the episcopal throne in 381.[8] If all three letters were composed for real correspondence (in other words, if none of them is fictitious or a rhetorical 'exercise'), one may guess that Celeusius insisted on communicating his displeasure at Gregory for not welcoming him with spoken expressions. This annoyance would then have forced Gregory to reply with a larger and argumentative letter. He introduces it with the rhetorical *terminus technicus* (δια)μυθολογέω, which is found in at least one other 'fable' narrated by him.[9]

Secondly, it is interesting that Gregory adopts the balanced tripartite construction (exposition, action proper, closing remark) of fables in later collections such as the *Augustana*.[10] Thus, his embedded fable starts with the exposition of the situation: "Swallows laughed at swans […]" (paragraph 2 of the epistle). Then, instead of a proper plot, the *agon* between the two groups is dramatized: see the boastful argument by the swallows in par. 3; the moderate defensive answer by the swans in par. 4; and the lesson of par. 5 uttered by the swans. In sum, there is no action, but only a contest of words between two avian species (swallows and swans), with each one of them explaining and defending its own attitude to song.

Each of these species is representative of a certain singing behaviour in the fabulistic continuum, as we will see below. In other terms, this fable is of a purely 'agonistic' type. Such mythological 'disputes' between animals or plants or natural elements flourished in the Near East (in Mesopotamia, e.g. in the collection of Ahiqar, and Egypt). In Greek literature, debate-fables appear from Hesiod onwards.[11] Interestingly, Gregory's fable in question has much in common with Callimachus of Cyrene's *Iambi* 4, the expanded debate-fable between the laurel and

8 Vertoudakis 2019, 145.

9 See Greg. Naz. *Carm. mor.* 873.11–13: πρὸς ταῦτα καί τι μυθολογῆσαί σοι θέλω, | εἰ δεῖ τι παίζειν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν συμφορῶν, | μῦθον πρέποντα τοῖσδε τοῖς σοφίσμασι ("in addition to these, I want to recite you — if we must play somehow in the middle of calamities — an adequate fable for these arguments"): a fable for wicked people who manage to avoid difficulties is recalled. An owl manages to "justify/sanctify" every reproach uttered against her body, but she then leaves humiliated (*PG* 37.873.14–874.10).

10 See Holzberg 2002, 86–87.

11 On Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (*Op.* 202–212), see the contribution by Currie in this volume.

the olive tree. The resemblance between these two masterpieces consists in their length, the rhetorical vigour of the contestants' arguments, as well as in the Oriental provenance of both fables. Callimachus claims that οἱ πάλαι Λυδοὶ ("the ancient Lydians") recite this story. Would it not have been plausible for Gregory to be familiar with and have a predilection for this type of Eastern fables due to his Anatolian (Cappadocian) origins? If this is true, then the structure and layout of Gregory's fable mark the continuation of a rich tradition.[12]

Thirdly, in terms of rhetoric, Gregory writes that he will narrate a fable to Celeusius the judge, to avert him from his φλυαρία ("garrulity"). In a philosophical and theological context, he aims to teach Celeusius an Orthodox ideal, namely σιωπή, via a fable. This epistle with its biting language indicates that Gregory built relationships with others using his eloquence.[13] Birds and insects are a frequent theme in Gregory's writings, some with positive, others with negative connotations. Ethical parameters and metapoetic comments emerge from Gregory's pen through the reference to birds. In this fable, there is a dispute between swans and swallows; this could be seen as one in a series of singing competitions between birds, which go as far back as Hesiod's poems.[14]

'Music battles' between different species of animals are a favourite practice with fabulists and a suitable way for them to stress the tensions in human relationships. Gregory's rhetorical studies in Athens would have justified the reference to this city as his inspiration for the use of fable material in his communications with other people. In *Ep.* 114, the embedded fable could be either one he remembered, or a fable he created, on the basis of traditional patterns of the genre. While blending Oriental and Greek features, Gregory suggests the 'Atticism' of this fable by the utterance of swallows: "we speak to humans and tell them our stories, these being indeed ancient and Attic: Pandion, Athens, Tereus, Thrace, the departure, the anxiety, the violence, the excision, the letters, and above all Itys, and how we became birds from humans." Wittig claims that the swallow's reproaches against the swan are based on the myth of Procne and Philomela, narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; as Spielhofer notes, this myth is also reworked in the fables of Babrius (*Fable* 12).[15] It is likely that Gregory improvised on

12 On the Anatolian provenance of such 'debates', see Adrados 1999, 303–305, 350–351, 354, 356. On the characteristics of Callimachus' *Iambi* 4, see Clayman 2022, 421. On Callimachus' *Iambi* 4, see also the contribution by Bottini in this volume.

13 See Storin 2019b, 81, 86 n. 47.

14 On such competitions in poetry, see Christodoulou 2020, 93 n. 38; on fables in Hesiod, see Bruno Currie's paper in this volume.

15 See Wittig 1981, 249 n. 241, on the narration in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about Tereus, Procne, Philomela, and Itys (*Met.* 6.412–674), with the metamorphosis into birds narrated in 6.667–674. On

Babrius' fable, or that he playfully adapted a well-known myth from Ovid to suit his intentions.

Gregory compares himself to a swan and likens the judge Celeusius, his interlocutor, to a swallow. The silent swan recalls Gregory's ascetic ἀφωνία, his silent Lenten fasting, and the fable of the swan who sang its song only when its masters threatened to kill it.[16] On the other hand, the swallow is the bird most characteristic for seeking mutuality with people and building its nest on humans' roofs, as ancient fables point out, seeking the aetiology of this avian habit.[17]

It is time to ask why Gregory chooses to present this fable in his *Epistle* 114. He is supposed to remain silent; he hesitates to expand his argumentation, yet he uses a fable, a rhetorical device, like an orator. This oxymoron is solved when he equates himself with the swan, which rarely sings (= speaks). Additionally, by 'having' a fable 'told' by birds, he cannot be accused of chatter, since he lets birds 'play' the story and transfer the moral. Even the emphatic utterance to his correspondent, "Realize what I'm telling you", is borrowed from Pindar. Gregory caps his letter with a proverb, a concise anonymous wisdom text ("the swans will sing their songs when the jackdaws keep quiet"). Thus, he does not have to speak for himself and can remain true to his attitude.

Additionally, it is appropriate to investigate the poetics of this choice, in other words, whether the epistle becomes more theatrical and richer in content and ideas through its fable content. Most scholars explain the swan's utterance μέτρῳ φιλοσοφοῦμεν τὸ μέλος ("we treat each part of the song philosophically, with due measure") as a reference to the "poetic and moral μέτρον" of Gregory, in De Blasi's words.[18] Interestingly, Gregory makes use of a similar stock fable about the swan and nightingale's song again in a friendly epistolary poem (2.2.7.306–313) addressed to another legal figure, Nemesius the governor of Cappadocia (*terminus ante quem* of this poem is 384 CE).[19] Gregory is clearly referring to these birds'

Babr. 12, the swallow's calling towards the nightingale to abandon solitude, and the similar answer of the nightingale, see Spielhofer 2023, 236 and 240–244.

16 Cf. Aesop. 233 P. [= 247 Hsr.; 175 Ch.; 1081 RA= VD 2015] with Christodoulou 2020, 92 n. 35. The swan also appears as a metapoetic symbol in Vergil's *Eclogue* 9.35–36, where it is compared to the goose, a less talented singer; see Clausen 1994, 279–280. Vergil's passage is also quoted in a letter by Symmachus, *Ep.* 1.1.4.

17 See Aesop. 39 P. [= Hsr.; 350 Ch.; RA= 351 and 359 VD 2015] with Christodoulou 2020, 91 n. 32 and Holzberg 2021, 413 (on the reception of Aesop. 39 P. down to La Fontaine).

18 Ruether 1969, 126; Constas 1995, 256, 260–262; Børtnes/Hägg 2006, 125 n. 48; Storin 2019, 148; De Blasi 2020, 262–263.

19 On Nemesius as a correspondent of Gregory, see Gallay 1967, 90; on this poem and its context, see Bénin 2021, 147–148, 158 and 177–178.

song, among many references to ancient Greek myths, in a metapoetic sense; he speaks of his poem as a Christological gift and as a call to conversion for the pagan Nemesius:

> Ἀλλὰ φίλων ὄχ' ἄριστε Νεμέσσιε, τοῦτο δέδεξο
> δῶρον ἐμῆς φιλίης, πάντων γλυκερώτερον ἄλλων,
> μοῦνον ἀφ' ἡμετέρων κτεάνων καὶ μοῦνον ἔμοιγε,
> οὐ κύκνου λιγυροῖο μόρον γοάοντος ἀοιδὴν
> γηραλέαις πτερύγεσσιν ὅτ' ἐμπίπτῃσιν ἀήτης.
> Οὐδ' ἄρ' ἀηδονίδος στυγνὸν μέλος, ἡνίκα χεῖμα
> δεσμὰ φέρει πάντεσσι καὶ ὀρνίθεσσιν ἀοιδοῖς,
> ἀλλὰ Χριστοφόρων στομάτων θεοτευχέα μολπήν.
> (Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 2.2.7.306–313)

> But now, Nemesius, you, the best of my friends, accept this gift of my friendship, the sweetest [gift] of all, the only remains of my family's and my own possessions, [which song is] neither a shrill swan's song, who bewails his destiny when the wind falls in his old wings, nor a nightingale's gloomy song, when winter casts his chains on everything, and on singing birds, but a song of God's fashioning, from a mouth of one of those who bear the name of Christ.
> (Transl. M.Chr.)

It is worth noting that birds are not always presented as fable characters in Gregory's writings. In an epigram of his, from the *Greek* (or *Palatine*) *Anthology*, nightingales play another role; they are used to evoke a bucolic scene, at least at first sight.

> Κρῆναι καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἄλσεα καὶ **λαλαγεῦντες**
> ὄρνιθες λιγυροί καλὸν ἀπ' ἀκρεμόνων
> αὖραί τε μαλακὸν συρίγμασι κῶμα φέρουσαι,
> καὶ κῆποι Χαρίτων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων,
> κλαύσατε· ὦ χαρίεσσ' Εὐφημιάς, ὥς σε θανών περ
> Εὐφήμιος κλεινὴν θήκατ' ἐπωνυμίῃ.
> (*Anth. Pal.* 8.129)

> Springs, rivers, and groves, and singing birds that twitter sweetly on the branches, and breezes whose whistling brings soft sleep, and gardens of the linked Graces, weep. O charming Euphemias, how Euphemius though dead has made your name famous.
> (Transl. Paton, slightly adapted)

The passage refers to λαλαγεῦντες | ὄρνιθες λιγυροὶ καλὸν ἐπ' ἀκρεμόνων. The melodious birds are a part of this *locus amoenus*, with a borrowing from Theocritus (*Anth. Pal.* 9.437.9–12). The poem by Theocritus describes the scenery around a ξόανον for Priapus:

> [...] εἰαρινοὶ δὲ λιγυφθόγγοισιν ἀοιδαῖς
> κόσσυφοι ἀχεῦσιν ποικιλότραυλα μέλη·
> ξουθαὶ δ' ἀδονίδες μινυρίσμασιν ἀνταχεῦσι
> μέλπουσαι στόμασιν τὰν μελίγαρυν ὄπα ...
> (*Anth. Pal.* 9.437.9–12)
>
> In spring the shrill song of the blackbirds echoes here with its varied notes, and the brown nightingales pour from their throats their honeyed voice in response.
>
> (Transl. Paton)

Yet this earthly paradise is cleverly twisted at the end of Gregory's epigram, where it is revealed that this harmonious place surrounds Euphemius the Cappadocian's tomb.[20] It can easily be seen that there is a great antithesis between the singing creatures and the instruction κλαύσατε, on behalf of Gregory. Our poet at the same time both recalls and 'breaks' the norms of Hellenistic epigrams.

Concluding this first part, we may notice that Gregory addresses his embedded fables to educated correspondents, who would have had the *paideia* to recall recurring fables and to follow the connections between different ones used or alluded to by the Nazianzene. The rhetorical and poetical scope encompasses Gregory's joyful interplay of genres.

3 Epigrams by Gregory of Nazianzus: animal and non-animal fables?

After commenting on this promising fabulistic epistle by Gregory, it is interesting to investigate the possible reminiscence of fables in his epigrams. Before discussing individual epigrams, let us however stress that the material questioned below does not actually allude to specific fable narratives. Rather, the epigrams portrayed can be read and understood — to varying degrees — in the context of the ancient fabulistic tradition.

Gregory's epigrams in book 8 of the *Greek Anthology* are either sepulchral or related to stories of death. One of Gregory's series of epigrams (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156–158) relates Naucratius' unfortunate death while fishing. One of Basil the Great's brothers, the monk Naucratius, drowned when he got tangled in fishing nets while trying to draw them out of a river. The first epigram in the sequence is more elaborate and narrative, while the next two epigrams on the same subject are

20 See Waltz 1960, 116; Simelidis 2019, 642.

more concise variations of the first one. All three epigrams stress that death in water is feared, and that men are in danger in water, since we are not marine creatures — remember the Stoic motto ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, which finds application in numerous fables.

Ἰχθυβόλον ποτ' ἔλυε λίνον βυθίης ἀπὸ πέτρης
Ναυκράτιος δίναις ἐν ποταμοῦ βρυχίαις·
καὶ τὸ μὲν οὐκ ἀνέλυσεν, ὁ δ' ἔσχετο. πῶς ἁλιῆα
εἵρυσεν ἀνθ' ἁλίης δίκτυον εἰπέ, Λόγε,
Ναυκράτιον, καθαροῖο βίου νόμον, ὥσπερ ἐίσκω, 5
καὶ χάριν ἐλθέμεναι καὶ μόρον ἐξ ὑδάτων.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.156)

Naucratius was once freeing his fishing-net from a sunken rock in the roaring whirlpools of the river. He did not free the net but was caught himself. Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish? Naucratius was an example of pure life, and I trust that both grace and death came to him from the water.

(Transl. Simelidis)

This group is noteworthy for its content. The phrase "how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?" is the expression of a rhetorical paradox, that is an epideictic trait. Simelidis remarks that the theme of the strange death of a fisherman is popular with Hellenistic epigrammatists and their successors.[21] For example, in a Hellenistic epigram by Leonidas of Tarentum, we read:

Πάρμις ὁ Καλλιγνώτου ἐπακταῖος καλαμευτής
ἄκρος καὶ κίχλης καὶ σκάρου ἰχθυβολεὺς
καὶ λάβρου πέρκης δελεάρπαγος ὅσσα τε κοίλας
σήραγγας πέτρας τ' ἐμβυθίους νέμεται,
ἄγρης ἐκ πλωτῆς ποτ' ἰουλίδα πετρήεσσαν 5
δακνάζων ὁλοὴν ἐξ ἁλὸς ἀράμενος
ἔφθιτ'· ὀλισθηρὴ γὰρ ὑπὲκ χερὸς ἀίξασα
ᾤχετ' ἐπὶ στεινὸν παλλομένη φάρυγα.
χὠ μὲν μηρίνθων καὶ δούνακος ἀγκίστρων τε
ἐγγὺς ἀπὸ πνοιὴν ἦκε κυλινδόμενος, 10
νήματ' ἀναπλήσας ἐπιμοίρια· τοῦ δὲ θανόντος
Γρίπων ὁ γριπεὺς τοῦτον ἔχωσε τάφον.
(*Anth. Pal.* 7.504)

21 See epigrams by Leonidas of Tarentum, *Anth. Pal.* 7.504 [= 66 HE]; Apollonides, *Anth. Pal.* 7.702 [= 12 GP], of the early Imperial period, and 'Sappho' III (Page 1981, 185–186) on the same subject; cf. Simelidis 2019, 639–640. It is interesting to see this epigram by Gregory as a consolation for Naucratius' family, as hope for Naucratius' baptism through water surrounding him during his accident, according to Simelidis *l.c.*

> Parmis, Callignotus' son, the shore-fisher, a first class hand at catching wrasse and scaros and the perch, greedy seizer of the bait, and all fish that live in crevices and on the rocky bottoms, met his death by biting a rock-dwelling iulis from his first catch of the day, a fish he lifted from the sea for his destruction; for slipping from his fingers, it went wriggling down his narrow gullet. So breathed he his last, rolling over in agony, near his lines, rod, and hooks, fulfilling the doom the destinies spun on him, and Gripo the fisherman built him this tomb.
>
> (Transl. Paton)

The fisherman of this story accidentally swallows a fish that he has caught and chokes. Such stories are called 'anecdotes' by Page, following the paradoxical motif of 'the killer killed by his victim'.[22] By mentioning the story behind Leonidas' epigram, I do not suggest an allusion by Gregory to the fable of the fisherman who chokes on the fish he has caught, since Naucratius' accident was real and does not involve choking by swallowing fish. Gregory's rhetorical question, "Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?", could rather be interpreted as expressing his concern about Naucratius' paradoxical fatal accident. All in all, Gregory 'Christianizes' the topic of the strange death of a fisherman; he apostrophizes the Lord (εἰπέ, Λόγε) asking Him to justify Naucratius' calamity. Gregory then receives the 'illumination' that Naucratius' passing away served as his baptism (see n. 21 above).

If we view the motif another way, namely as the topic of fishing in fables, chance is connected to (un-)successful fishing in the fables "Ἁλιεῖς καὶ θύννος" (Aesop. 21 P. [= Hsr; 22 Ch.]) and "Ἁλιεῖς λίθον ἀγρεύσαντες" (Aesop. 13 P. [= Hsr.; 23 Ch.]). The topic of fishing may have been introduced into fable literature by Babrius.[23] However, in Babrius the point of the fable does not concern misfortune.

In Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.21, the smallness, rareness, and excellence of a pearl (μάργαρος) is the first of three elements in a simile (pearl, Bethlehem, Nazianzus).

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22 On the term *anecdote*, see Page 1981, 546; see also Gow/Page 1968, II,128. See the discussion of such epigrams in Vertoudakis 2019, 634; Christodoulou 2020, 86 n. 15. An attempt is made in Christodoulou 2020, *l.c.*, to relate these epigrams to Aesop. 139 P. [= 144 Hsr.; 194 Ch.], "Λάρος καὶ ἰκτῖνος" or "Sea-gull and Kite". In this fable, a gull is choked by eating a fish, and a kite reproaches the gull for trying to feed from the sea despite being a winged creature whose realm is the sky. As for the kite in 139 P., the bird is perhaps authorized to give the gull a moral lesson since Aristophanes in *Birds* grants this bird a royal past; the aetiology for this honour is that people bow before it when it first arrives in spring. See Ar. *Av*. 499–503 with ancient scholia on *Av*. 501. Additionally, the motif of 'the killer killed or defeated by his victim' is popular in fable. For instance, in the fable "Κόραξ καὶ ὄφις" or "Crow and Snake" (Aesop. 128 P. [= 130 Hsr.; 168 Ch.]), a crow grasps a sleeping snake, but the snake bites the crow to death.

23 See Babr. 4; Babr. 6; Babr. 9.

This comparison could remind Classicists of the fable theme of the philosophical distinction between εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι.[24]

> Τυτθὴ μάργαρός ἐστιν, ἀτὰρ λιθάκεσσιν ἀνάσσει·
> τυτθὴ καὶ Βηθλέμ, ἔμπα δὲ χριστοφόρος.
> ὣς δ' ὀλίγην μὲν ἐγὼ ποίμνην λάχον, ἀλλὰ φερίστην
> Γρηγόριος, τὴν σύ, παῖ φίλε, λίσσομ' ἄγοις.
> (*Anth. Pal.* 8.21)

> Small is the pearl, but the queen of jewels; small is Bethlehem, but yet the mother of Christ; so a little flock was mine, Gregory's, but of the best; and I pray, my dear son, that you may lead it.
> (Transl. Paton, slightly altered)

Μάργαρος, a Gregorian *hapax* in the *Greek Anthology*, is praised elsewhere in Gregory: Μάργαρος ἐν λάεσσιν, ἐν ἀστράσι φωσφόρος ἄλλος, | Εἴαρ ἐν ὥρῃσιν, ἐν δὲ φυτοῖσι ῥόδον ("a pearl amid stones, another Phosphoros (Morning Star) amid stars, spring amid seasons, rose amid plants", Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 37.1460.13–14), referring to a certain Cledonius.[25] On the other hand, Gregory advises a virgin not to be adorned with pearls, a sign of luxury: Μάργαρος ἄλλην | Κοσμείτω, καὶ χρυσὸς ἐπαστράπτων μελέεσσιν ("A pearl, as well as gold which lightens upon body parts, should adorn other than you", Greg. Naz. *Carm. mor.* 585.3–4). In fables too, smallness and preciousness are more important than abundance. In its relevance to pearls and in terms of metapoetics, Phaedrus 3.12 Z. [= G.] is instructive: a hungry cockerel finds a pearl, rates its price for men, but finds it useless for himself. According to the epimythium, the poet addresses this poem to those who do not understand him. Additionally, Avianus elaborates on the fable "The Turtle and the Eagle" (Avian. 2.1–8) to include as a detail the turtle's vanity in wishing to travel to the Red Sea to collect pearl shells.[26] Of course, if we take into consideration the theological context of Gregory's set of themes, the image of the pearl is more likely to be taken from Scripture, for example from Jesus' parable of the pearl merchant in *Matthew* (*Ev.Matt*. 13.45–46), than from the classical fable corpus. Μαργαρίτης is then the most precious stone, a token of the Kingdom of Heaven.[27]

24 This epigram is commented upon by Cerroni 2020, who does not mention any fable allusion.

25 Cf. Greg. Naz. *Carm. dogm.* 37.500.2–4.

26 Mann 2015, 146–147, 284–286.

27 *Ev.Matt*. 13.45–46: Πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ ἐμπόρῳ ζητοῦντι καλοὺς μαργαρίτας· ὃς εὑρὼν ἕνα πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην ἀπελθὼν πέπρακε πάντα ὅσα εἶχε καὶ ἠγόρασεν αὐτόν ("The Kingdom of Heaven also resembles a merchant who sought good pearls. When he found a precious pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it", Αποστολική

Criticism of the temptations of wealth is also omnipresent in numerous epigrams by Gregory included in the *Palatine Anthology* under the category "κατὰ τυμβωρύχων" ("against tomb desecrators"). It is well known that this category comprises one third of the whole corpus of book 8, suggesting the gravity of the issue and probably indicating the purpose of composing such epigrams to be inscribed on tombs.[28] These epigrams often stress the ill consequences of gold for the wicked: desecration of tombs is the result of avarice. For example, Gregory's epigram 8.209 closes — in a fabulistic manner — with an epimythium: χρυσοῦ δεύτερα πάντ' ἀδίκοις ("for wicked men everything is lesser than gold", *Anth. Pal.* 8.209.6). A similar epimythium closes an early Imperial epigram by Antiphilus of Byzantium: ἧς ἄρα κὴν ἀλόγοις, χρυσέ, κακοῦ πρόφασις ("thus even to brutes, Gold, you are a cause of evil", *Anth. Pal.* 9.310.6 [= 41 GP]; transl. Gow-Page 1968). We could call Antiphilus' epigram a versified fable: a mouse swallows gold; its belly then gets too heavy to move onward; therefore, the mouse is caught and dissected by men because of the gold. One can see that animals can find their place even in sepulchral epigrams.[29]

In other epigrams, Gregory stresses the pious custom of burying the body of a stranger who has died away from his homeland, presumably due to difficult travel conditions and constant wars. In *Anth. Pal.* 8.213.1–2, he crafts a hyperbole: the deceased begs the passers-by to throw his corpse in a river (Λίσσομαι· ἤν γε θάνω, ποταμῷ δέμας [...] | ῥίψατε, "I beseech you, if I die, throw my body into a river"; transl. Paton, adjusted). The other two options that he gives is for the body to be given to dogs, or to be burnt, for fear of being destroyed by tomb desecrators. Gregory's scenario of a dead man's corpse ending up in a river is not unparalleled in Hellenistic epigrams — even if this does not imply a direct intertextual link. As an example, let us mention a 'new fable', Ἰχθύας τις βάλλων καὶ ναυαγοῦ κάρα ("The Fisherman and the Shipwrecked Man's Head"), that is put in verse by Carpyllides, probably a Hellenistic epigrammatist:

> Ἰχθῦς ἀγκίστρῳ τις ἀπ' ἠόνος εὔτριχι βάλλων
> εἵλκυσε ναυηγοῦ κρᾶτα λιποτριχέα,
> οἰκτείρας δὲ νέκυν τὸν ἀσώματον ἐξ ἀσιδήρου

Διακονία [Apostolikē Diakonia] 2005, 30; transl. M.Chr.). See also Strong's contribution in this volume, who compares fables to biblical parables.

28 See Waltz 1960, 25; Vertoudakis 2019, 636–637.

29 *Anth. Pal.* 9.310 [= 41 GP] is not mentioned as a fable paradigm by RA-VD. A negative depiction of gold is recurrent in ancient fable literature (Phaed. 1.27 Z. [= G.]; 5.20 Z. [= 4.21 G.]; Babr. 119; 123; Avian. 33; also, Aesop. 225 P. [= 253 Hsr.; 345 Ch.]; 24 P. [= Hsr.; 30 Ch.]). On the criticism of love for gold and gluttony in the *Augustana*, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 147–153.

χειρὸς ἐπισκάπτων λιτὸν ἔχωσε τάφον,
εὗρε δὲ κευθόμενον χρυσοῦ κτέαρ. ἦ ῥα δικαίοις 5
ἀνδράσιν εὐσεβίης οὐκ ἀπόλωλε χάρις.
(*Anth. Pal.* 9.52 [= 2 HE; RA III, S. 157 VD; 1099 VD 2015])

A man, angling on the beach with a hook attached to a fine hair line, brought to shore the hairless head of a shipwrecked man. Pitying the bodiless corpse, he dug a little grave with his hands, having no tool, and found there hidden a treasure of gold. And so, righteous men lose not the reward of piety.

(Transl. Paton, slightly adjusted)

I have suggested that Carpyllides' fable corresponds to another 'new fable', named "Cyclops and Man", found in two Greek epigrams of early Imperial period by Statilius Flaccus and which inspired Ausonius in one of his epigrams.[30] Even if Gregory does not actively allude to the above two fables ("The Fisherman and the Shipwrecked Man's Head" and "Cyclops and Man"), he artfully reverses the motif of a corpse thrown into a river and presents it as fortune instead of misfortune, as a way to avoid desecration. His concern is again to teach pious burial of the dead and to warn against violating tombs.

Finally, in other epigrams about tomb desecrations, there may be an allusion to a famous lion fable about betrayal by one's kin, another significant fable motif. In Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.210.3–4, a γείτων, a neighbour, is the one who violates the tomb.

Πολλάκι ναυηγοῖο δέμας κατέχωσεν ὁδίτης
κύμασι πλαζόμενον, πολλάκι θηρολέτου,
ἤδη καί πολέμῳ τις ὃν ὤλεσεν· ἀλλ' ἐμὲ **γείτων**
χωσθέντ' ἀλλοτρίαις χερσὶν **ἔπερσε τάφον**.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.210.3–4)

Many times a traveller has buried the body of a shipwrecked man found tossing on the waves, many times one <has buried> the body of a man slain by beasts, often has one <buried> him whom he slew in war, but **a neighbour pillaged me, the tomb** that was piled by foreign hands.

(Transl. Paton, adjusted)

More vividly, θὴρ […] ἐφέστιος is the metaphor used for the impious neighbour in Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.178:

30 On Carpyllides' epigram, see van Dijk 1997, 28F1, 266–267; on Statilius Flaccus *Anth. Pal.* 9.44–45 [= 8–9 GP] and Ausonius *Epigr.* 23, see Kay 2001, 125–127; on both fables discussed, see Christodoulou 2020, 86 n. 17. Statilius Flaccus and Ausonius narrate how a poor and pious man is rewarded by finding a rich man's (or Cyclop's) gold, while the rich man loses his gold and commits suicide.

Ἦν ὅτε ἦν ἀτίνακτος ἐγὼ τάφος, οὔρεος ἄκρην
πουλὺς ὑπερτέλλων τηλεφανὴς σκόπελος·
νῦν δέ με **θὴρ** ἐτίναξεν **ἐφέστιος** εἵνεκα **χρυσοῦ**·
ὧδε δ' ἐτινάχθην **γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις**.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.178)

I was once an undisturbed tomb, like a rock rising high above the mountain summit, and conspicuous from afar; but now a beast from my own house has destroyed me for the sake of gold, and thus I was demolished by the hands of my neighbour.

(Transl. Paton)

Waltz, in his edition, believes that an antithesis and a simile are hidden here. He thinks that θὴρ ἐφέστιος is an antithesis indicating that, in the past, the desecrator had been ἐφέστιος to the deceased, since the neighbour must have enjoyed hospitality from the now dead person. Now, the desecrator acts as a θήρ, like a beast which unearths carcasses — does he mean 'to feed itself'? This would suggest an allusion to animalism of human beings, even cannibalism. I would propose that θὴρ […] ἐφέστιος recalls the well-known Aeschylean fable about a man who raised a lion cub that ultimately devoured his master's house.[31]

ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἴ-
νιν δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὔ-
τως ἀνὴρ φιλόμαστον […]
πολέα δ' ἔσχ' **ἐν ἀγκάλαις**
νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν, […]
χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων
μηλοφόνοισι σὺν ἄταις
δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·
αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη
(Aesch. *Ag.* 717–732)

Even so a man reared in his house a lion's whelp, robbed of its mother's milk yet still desiring the breast. […] Much did it get, held in arms like a nursling child […] But brought to full growth by time it showed the nature it had from its parents. Unbidden, as payment for its fostering, it prepared a feast with ruinous slaughter of the flocks.

(Transl. Smyth)

31 A connection between the passage and Aeschylus' fable (*Ag.* 717–736 [= RA III, S. 18 VD; 1235 VD 2015]; "Ἀνὴρ καὶ λέοντος ἴνις") follows Christodoulou 2020, 94 n. 43. On the rhetorical simile/fable of beast and feast in the *Iliad* (24.31–45 and elsewhere) as well as its connection to Aesch. *Ag.* 717–736 and to the need of special treatment of the dead, see also Keating McKeon's paper in this volume.

It is attractive to think of Gregory as a reader of Aeschylus. First, Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.178 recalls the Aeschylean fable through the phrase θὴρ [...] ἐφέστιος, which could be reminiscent of the lines ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἴ-| νιν δόμοις [...] ἀνήρ. Further, he creates an antithesis between the past (Ἦν ὅτε [...]), when the tomb was ἀτίνακτος, and the present (νῦν δέ), when με θὴρ ἐτίναξεν ἐφέστιος. There is a similar structure in *Agamemnon*'s passage (ἔθρεψεν δὲ [...] ἀνήρ ~ χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν [λέων] ἦθος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων). A repetition of the verb τινάσσω in the last verse (ὧδε δ' ἐτινάχθην γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις) sets the two situations in parallel (devouring beast and violent desecrator). Finally, the affectionate prepositional phrase ἐν ἀγκάλαις in Aeschylus (showing man's love for the lion cub) could be echoed in Gregory's γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις. Although such a comparison cannot be supported with exact verbal parallels between these texts, the aforementioned indications make this relationship at least plausible. Of course, such ironic wordplay would suggest the betrayal of the deceased by the neighbour. All in all, this intertextual allusion would perhaps imply Gregory's wish to render the act of tomb desecration as something tragic, to scare off future desecrators.

4 Conclusions

What should be the conclusion of this survey? I believe that I have managed to prove, to a certain extent, that Gregory of Nazianzus inserted into his writings some themes and practices from ancient fables. First, Gregory's *Epistles* mentioned above make use of fables as *exempla* through the poetological comparison between the sounds of various birds and their effect. Singing competitions between birds help him define his credo as implicitly as he can. It is not easy to judge him negatively since he delicately "plays" with fable material.

Equally metapoetic is the reference to μάργαρος, which is the synonym for a small but precious heritage. It probably suggests here Gregory's love for his father's small parish in Nazianzus. He seems confident that he will be able to guide his little flock in Jesus' ways and make them shine in virtue just like a small pearl. Whereas in his *Epistle* 114 Gregory has the chance to elaborate the narrative about swallows and swans, in his epigram about μάργαρος he conforms to the nature of this genre by choosing a short priamel.

Moreover, his choice of fable themes has to do with the treatment of the role of Chance in man's life. The common motif of the fisherman killed by his victim or during his work is "Christianized" by Gregory. The Church Father is innovating on the belief in Chance, this ancient Greek and Roman deity. He attributes people's misfortune to God's mysterious plan, as in the case of Naucratius' drowning, with

the rhetorical question, "Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?" (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156.3–4). Thus, the Church Father is relieved, hoping for Naucratius' salvation through baptism in the same water that took his life.

As for his treatment of the fate of people's corpses threatened by desecration, Gregory stresses the danger of pillaging tombs, suggesting two alternatives: either generosity and its reward, or gluttony and its aftermath. In a fabulistic atmosphere, he stresses how gold becomes a punishment for the wicked (analogously, the loss of gold prompts an impious man, or Cyclops, to hang himself). To the contrary, gold becomes a reward for the pious (as it is the case in fables, for the poor man who found the Cyclops' treasure and abandoned the idea of committing suicide, and the fisherman who discovered a rich hoard while burying an abandoned scull). Indeed, moral lessons emerge, since Gregory's critique aims to portray wealth as a vice, in accord with his didactic career as a bishop.

Finally, the maxim "Respect your limits" finds its way into Naucratius' misfortune and the neighbour's betrayal (we should not fully trust the sea, nor every neighbour, who might prove an animalistic tomb desecrator).[32] We are also quite justified in saying that Gregory alludes to a fable of a man giving parental affection to a lion cub (or to a wolf, in other versions), in other words to a θήρ, which would not manage to go against its animal nature. The fierce beast devours the house, just as the neighbour of a deceased person violates his tomb. Of course, Gregory's texts analysed above prove that they address a reader of at least a moderate level of education. It is not clear that every reader of Gregory would have been able to discern the web of interplay between fables and epistles or epigrams. Since Gregory is educated in a multicultural *milieu* where Near Eastern and Graeco-latin fable is in stock, familiarity with fables for the reader is a *sine qua non* to catch the mind-game of intertextuality in his works.

In conclusion, it is obvious that further inquiry into Gregory of Nazianzus' corpus may shed more light on the impact of fable material on Gregory's mentality and rhetoric. As for other primary sources, much more research needs to be done to reveal the impact of ancient fables on epigrams in early Byzantium, including Palladas and Agathias' *Cycle*, among others. And it would be useful to compare this corpus to attested epigraphic production of the same period. It also remains to study Christian epigrams, their context, their rhetoric, their philosoph-

32 On the role of Chance and Fate in the *Augustana Collection*, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 137–140; on the maxim "Respect your limits", see Zafiropoulos 2001, 71–72, 75–76.

ical and theological value, to give more support to speculations about Christian epigrams and their links to ancient or not so ancient fables.[33]

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Justin David Strong

“And Jesus Told Them a Fable”: On Methods and Motivations for Embedding Fables in the Gospels

Abstract: More fables are embedded into the gospels than perhaps any other ancient corpus. These texts are seldom engaged in the study of ancient fables by classicists. This article introduces reading the texts that biblical scholars have traditionally called “parables” as fables. Using a few illustrative examples, I show that these texts are valuable for current scholarly conversations motivating classical research into ancient fables. They offer windows into the adaptation of the fable genre in different cultural contexts and insights into the characterization of fable tellers and their audiences. Embedded into narratives, fables in the gospels offer examples of the genre’s many useful applications, from communicating insider language and subversive speech to education and forensic rhetoric. This article serves as an introduction and invitation to future work on the fables in the gospels.

1 Introduction

With more fables embedded into the gospels than perhaps any other ancient corpus, they represent a premier inroad for understanding the function of fables in broader narrative contents. This article begins by introducing how reading the group of texts traditionally called “narrative parables” as fables has much to offer to current scholarly conversations on ancient fables. Using a few illustrative examples from the gospels of Mark and Luke, I then provide a survey of the rhetorical functions that fables serve for their user within the story and at the author-audience level by their inclusion — such as insider speech

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and education. Along the way, I describe the compositional techniques used to embed fables into their intradiegetic narrative contexts.[1]

Collectively, the fables embedded into the gospel metanarratives accomplish the diverse objectives known elsewhere in the ancient fable tradition. We will explore examples of 1) fables used to educate and edify narrative characters and implied readers; 2) fables used as a means to convey a hidden transcript and subversive speech of the subaltern; and 3) fables used as a rhetorical tool to persuade in forensic settings. Embedded into a metanarrative, these uses support the authors' sometimes disparate characterizations of the fable teller and his audiences, which include characters within the narrative and implied readers. The fable thus has a multifaceted utility in the gospels, from something as key as capturing the quintessential message of Jesus to less weighty objectives like holding a reader's attention through the long gospel plot. We will also examine the embedding strategies used by these authors to incorporate fables that were taken from source materials. We will see examples of embedding strategies that include 1) introducing a fable by a chreia, 2) narrativizing pro- and epimythia to convey that they are read by the protagonist to his audience, and 3) fables and epimythia that are merely spliced into the text without narrativizing techniques or regard for narrative continuity.

Like many working on the fable, I use the definition from the *progymnasmata*, or "preliminary exercises" in rhetoric, as my starting point: Μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν [...] οἷς μετὰ τὴν ἔκθεσιν ἐπιλέγομεν τὸν λόγον ὅτου εἰκών ἐστιν ("Fable is a fictitious story giving an image of truth [...] after (or before) which we state the meaning for which it is an image", Theon *Prog.* 4 [72 Spengel]).[2]

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1 We have a complex narratological situation that requires describing several narrative levels involved with embedded fables. I refer to three levels, the level of gospel authors and readers (extradiegetic), the level of the characters at the gospel story level (intradiegetic), and the level of fable storyworlds embedded within the gospels (hypodiegetic). Thus, the gospel authors (extradiegetic narrators), tell a story about a story-telling protagonist (an intradiegetic narrator), whose fables are still one level deeper (a hypodiegetic narration).

2 E.g. Perry 1965, xx; Holzberg 2002, 19–20: "There have been many attempts to find a definition of the genre that takes cognizance of this diversity, but the most convincing one is still the description found in the rhetors Theon and Aphthonius." Nearly every word of Theon's definition carries polyvalence that is difficult to capture in translation and the precise meaning of some terms are debated. Nevertheless, it is a useful starting point (not endpoint) particularly because defining the fable has a complex history. The most comprehensive study of the ancient and modern definitions is van Dijk 1997, with more recent work cited in Gärtner 2015, 13–14. Granting that any such criteria can be problematized, for simplicity sake, I restrict myself in this article to a definition that includes the qualities identified by Perry 1952, ix: "a fable must combine three features: (1) unlike the chr[e]ia or the historical example it must be obviously and deliberately

Since (1) these texts were the standard curriculum in Graeco-Roman education for prose composition, (2) the origin of the "parables" in the gospels has been a fundamental mystery,[3] (3) genres are governed by reading conventions and expectations, and (4) especially since what theologians call "parables" match the fable definition, investigating them from the fable context is a worthwhile pursuit. While scholars of the New Testament are no strangers to engaging in studies of its contemporary literary world generally or ancient rhetoric specifically, engagement with the fable has been rather limited.[4] Among the many obstacles for this limited engagement have been naïve ideas about ancient fables and the red herring that the gospels do not record talking animal fables.[5] Recent years have wit-

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fictitious, whether possible or not; (2) like the proverb expressed in a gnomic aorist (e.g. 'the fool found out after the event'), which is essentially the same thing in embryo, but unlike the *Physiologus*-lore and unlike the Homeric simile, both of which are framed in general terms, it must purport to be a particular action, series of actions, or an utterance that took place once in past time through the agency of particular characters; and (3) it must be told, at least ostensibly, not for its own sake as a story (like many animal stories in Aelian, including the etiological variety with a purely scientific point), but for the sake of a point that is moral, paraenetic or personal."

3 Because scholars focusing on parables have not had the fable in view, the scholarly consensus has been the most implausible notion that Jesus was the first person in recorded history to use the parable with any regularity (see Strong 2021, 3–4).

4 With rare exceptions, such as Beavis 1990, the recognition of the synonymity between "parable" and "fable" has been made by scholars outside of New Testament scholarship who have perhaps not realized the implications for this field. Kennedy, a preeminent scholar of ancient rhetoric, writes during a discussion of the *progymnasmata*, "The parables of Jesus correspond to what was taught in the schools as mythos, for which the fables of Aesop were the standard classical models; this was regarded as the simplest and easiest of exercises" (1984, 22–23). Similarly, van Dijk, in his comprehensive study of ancient fable terminology and theory, states matter-of-factly, "A fundamental difference between fable and parable does not exist" (1997, 36). For a history of scholarship since circa 1900 and from circa 1900 back to the Renaissance, see Strong 2021, 8–22 and 231–241, respectively.

5 Equating "fable" with "talking animal fable" cannot be sustained after opening an ancient fable collection and in light of the *progymnasmata* discussions. In Theon, this notion is rejected already implicitly when the first fable that he cites as an example of the genre contains no talking animals, Ἡροδότῳ τοῦ αὐλητοῦ "the flute player in Herodotus" (Theon *Prog*. 2 [= 66 Spengel]; see Hdt. 1.141 and cf. e.g. Aesop. 11 P. [= Hsr.; 24 Ch.]). Although he rejects the view, Theon also observes that some contemporaries believe there is a correlation between the geographic locations associated with fables and whether or not they are about humans or animals, possible or impossible (*Prog*. 4; for the opposing view, cf. Nicolaus *Prog*. 2). Aphthonius likewise makes the point when he writes: τοῦ δὲ μύθου τὸ μὲν ἐστι λογικόν, τὸ δὲ ἠθικόν, τὸ δὲ μικτόν· καὶ λογικὸν μὲν ἐν ᾧ τι ποιῶν ἄνθρωπος πέπλασται, ἠθικόν δὲ τὸ τῶν ἀλόγων ἦθος ἀπομιμούμενον, μικτόν δὲ τὸ ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων, ἀλόγου καὶ λογικοῦ (*Prog*. 10.1 Rabe [= 21 Spengel]; "Some fables are rational, some ethical, some mixed; rational when a human being is imagined as doing something, ethical when

nessed a push past these obstacles, and a growing number of New Testament scholars coming to a realization: "It is clear that the parables of Jesus belong to the fable genre."[6] I thus employ the term "fable" here consistent with this understanding.[7]

Before the brief excursions into the gospels below, I would like to offer conclusions already by way of a promythium. For scholars of the ancient fable, there are many new and significant insights to be gleaned by bringing the fables in the gospels into conversation with the others. The early Christian gospels represent a largely untapped resource that is chronologically contemporary with our major fable sources — Phaedrus, Babrius, the *collectio Augustana*, and *The Life of Aesop*. Fables in the gospels are relevant to many subjects of interest to fable scholars today beyond simply new parallels to fables in other corpora. They grant insights into the trajectories and development of the genre through history and its adaptation to different cultural contexts, especially its Graeco-Semitic status. They offer important evidence for the perennial debates about when and whether social class associations accompanied the fable genre. The gospels provide a host of new examples to study alongside characterizations of the fable narrators and their

representing the character of irrational animals, mixed when made up of both, irrational and rational"; transl. Kennedy). As to why Jesus never overtly deploys talking animal fables in the gospels, this is actually a greater problem for the old paradigm of defining and dividing "parables" and "fables." In the prior consensus, it was accepted that fables were told by Jews, especially by rabbis in the centuries after Jesus who were famous for making fictional narrative comparisons (see Strong 2021, 173–199; 2023). It was also accepted that the gospel authors utilize the same rhetorical categories as other Greek authors and that they depict Jesus employing a robust repertoire of simple metaphorical figures with great frequency — proverbs, maxims, similes, etcetera. If "fables" and "parables" were neighbors in the cornucopia of simple metaphorical genres, and if other Jewish storytellers were telling both "parables" and "fables", and if Jesus was a master of utilizing these metaphorical figures, how can it be that he never once landed on a "fable?" A couple of speculative explanations are the same in any circumstance: that Jesus did tell animal fables but the gospels omit or substantially suppress them for one reason or another (e.g. Flusser 1981, 51–52, 153–154), or that Jesus, unlike other Jews, considered granting speech to non-humans as something too near polytheism. A better grasp of the ancient fable tradition may shed light on the question, as the *progymnasmata* authors attest to (and disagree over) sub-classifications of fables and the phenomenon of some fable tellers and some locations being associated with using only certain kinds of fables. Jesus using only one category is thus not particularly surprising. Indeed, the first modern scholar to note the explanatory power of the fable for Jesus's "parables" concluded they were "rational fables", following the categories used by Aphthonius (Storr 1779).

6 Parsons/Martin 2018, 62. See further, Teugels 2019; Strong 2021; 2022; 2023; Brobst-Renaud 2021; Pater et al. 2022.

7 For certain theology argot, I will also employ vocabulary consistent with translations of classical literature, thus παραβολή is not "(narrative) parable" but "comparison" or "illustration" and μαθητής is not "disciple" but "student."

audiences. Particularly when the editing of fable source materials into the metanarrative is crudely performed, the Gospels offer a glimpse at some possible strategies that would have been used elsewhere. Taken together, gospels represent a corpus of particular relevance to the present volume, aiming to understand the uses of fables in various other macro-genre settings.

The gospels offer not just a single new source for fables but rather many. Although the fables are attributed to one protagonist, Jesus, each gospel provides a unique representation of the tradition. Just like the relationship between Phaedrus, Babrius, and the *collectio Augustana*, the fable material of each gospel overlaps to a degree with the others, however, each gospel also has many fables unique to it that form an individual profile and indicate the author's broader tendencies.[8] The gospel authors have individual styles of composition, redaction, techniques by which they weave fables into their narrations, and strategies for placing and organizing fable material within their metanarrative. Each author has a preference for the fable characters they employ, the kinds of plots the fables contain, and the purpose for which the protagonist, Jesus, tells fables.[9] The gospels also vary in how fables are used to support a particular characterization of Jesus and those who hear his fables — both within the narrative and its implied readers/hearers.

In contrast to the relatively new interest in fables beyond text-critical reconstructions, there is a gargantuan bibliography devoted to approaching the "parables" of Jesus from a host of methods,[10] from socio-rhetorical perspectives,[11] literary theories,[12] to feminist criticism,[13] and ancient economic evidence from documentary papyri.[14] All these, in addition to commentaries from diverse approaches on the individual gospels in which these texts are embedded. While fable specialists may

8 The standard view among New Testament scholars is that Mark is the first narrative gospel and that Matthew and Luke independently had the text of Mark's gospel at hand (Markan Priority). These three interconnected texts — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — are called the Synoptic Gospels. The origin of the substantial overlaps between Matthew and Luke that are not explicable by their common source in Mark is explained by two prevailing theories. The Two Document Hypothesis proposes a second independent source apart from Mark that was used independently by Matthew and Luke. This hypothetical source (no copy of it survives) is called Q. The alternative theory supposes that Matthew and Luke are not independent, but rather that Luke had before him copies of both the Markan and Matthean gospel (Farrer Hypothesis).

9 For helpful surveys of the differences in the fable traditions of the individual gospel authors, see Goulder 1968; Anderson 2008.

10 For a history and survey of these methods, see Zimmermann 2015.

11 E.g. Eck 2016.

12 E.g. Via 1967.

13 E.g. Beavis 2002.

14 E.g. Kloppenborg 2006.

quickly wonder why these impressive studies on "parables" seldom show awareness of other fable corpora, they offer many templates that may inspire future work on other fables.

2 Fable Embedding, Weaving, Painting, and Fluidity

Insights into the compositional strategies of the gospel authors come from the literary training in Greek composition that they would have undergone.[15] As Theon says in the preface to his *Progymnasmata*:

> ὅ τε γὰρ καλῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως διήγησιν καὶ μῦθον ἀπαγγείλας καλῶς καὶ ἱστορίαν συνθήσει, καὶ τὸ ἰδίως ἐν ταῖς ὑποθέσεσι καλούμενον [ἴδιον] διήγημα (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλο τί ἐστιν ἱστορία καὶ σύστημα διηγήσεως)
>
> (Theon *Prog*. 1 [60 Spengel])

> One who has expressed a διήγησις (narration) and a μῦθος (fable) in a fine and varied way will also compose a history (ἱστορία) well and what is specifically called "narrative" (διήγησις) in hypotheses — historical writing is nothing other than a combination of narrations."
>
> (Transl. Kennedy)

Theon later explains how to weave a fable into a narrative, though he says nothing profound here — first state the fable and then how it applies to the situation, or do the reverse (*Prog*. 4 [65 Spengel]). The fable, the narrative, and the chreia form the building blocks with which the gospel authors weave in their fables.[16]

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15 Although education varied across the Roman Empire, the exercises in *progymnasmata* appear consistently as the means to learn composition. Although the momentum is certainly behind the view that the gospel authors trained in the *progymnasmata*, with evidence for some (Luke) better than others (Mark), it is not entirely settled. That said, even the skeptics concur that the authors encountered the fable and the chreia (see Strong 2021, 131–172; Adams 2016).

16 A chreia, occasionally translated as "anecdote", is a simple, brief, self-contained narrative about how someone (e.g. Diogenes, Aesop, Jesus) responded on a particular occasion to a situation, whether by statement or action (see also Theon's definition and examples in *Prog.* 3 [Spengel 96]). It is not difficult to imagine how a fable could be joined as the chreia response or how a chreia could be added to the beginning of a fable. Indeed, as Perry 1965, xcii, observes: "It is characteristic of Phaedrus, as of no other ancient fabulist whose book has survived, to represent a fable now and then as something that Aesop said or related in appropriate circumstances on a particular occasion in his life in conversation with others." Examples of fables introduced by a chreia are Phaed. 1.2 Z. [= G.], 1.6 Z. [= G.], 5.17 Z. [= 4.18 G.], *app*. 10 Z. [= *app*. 12 G.], and *Vit. Aesop.* 132–133 G. Examples in the gospels are discussed below.

Like a painter who does not smooth out his strokes or blend his paints on the canvas, the characteristic Greek of the gospels and their often awkward editing leave clues to the strategies used to incorporate fables into their intradiegetic narrative settings.[17] Indeed, the visible brush strokes and rough edges of the gospel writings offer clues about how other authors with more refined techniques and smoother end results would have gone about their task.

Since the gospels are fluid and "open texts", when a fable is shared among multiple gospels, it commonly appears in a different intradiegetic narrative context where it also may be told for a different purpose.[18] Similarly, the text of the fable itself is never identical but varies from one gospel to the next, whether minor differences or to such an extent that it strains the boundary of being one rather than two fables. To offer one example, the fable of "The Sower" in the Markan and Matthean gospels is spoken from a boat to a crowd on the shore (*Ev.Marc.* 4.1; *Ev.Matt*. 13.2), follows a chreia about Jesus' "true family" (*Ev.Marc.* 3.31–35; *Ev.Matt*. 12.46–50), and precedes "The Mustard Seed" by about twenty verses (*Ev.Marc.* 4.30–32; *Ev.Matt*. 13.31–32). In Luke, meanwhile, "The Sower" is simply spoken to a crowd with no body of water in view (*Ev.Luc.* 8.4), the chreia about his true family takes place afterward rather than beforehand (*Ev.Luc.* 8.19–21), and "The Mustard Seed" only makes its debut five chapters later (*Ev.Luc.* 13.18–19). In Thomas, a *logoi* collection without a meta-narrative, there is neither narrative context for "The Sower" (*Ev.Thom.* 9) nor allegorical interpretation afterward, it follows a different fable ("The Fish Net" [cf. Babr. 4]), and "The Mustard Seed" follows eleven *logoi* later.

Due to space limitations, it is not possible to do justice to the richness of the gospel fable tradition, and I offer here just a few illustrative snapshots of the preceding observations. The characteristically Semitic fables in the Gospel of Matthew and the fables of Jesus in the *logoi* collection known as the Gospel of Thomas will be treated elsewhere.[19] Here, I will address the Gospel of Mark, the first narra-

17 The Greek of Mark is colloquial rather than literary and precisely at the fable material in Mark 4, he has undertaken "clumsy editing of previous tradition" (Marcus 2000, 289). The Gospel of Luke, while composed in a comparatively higher literary register, has also left many noticeable signs of where he inserts fable source materials. The painter analogy also translates to the reason behind this particular quality of the Greek prose. Such techniques can reflect the limited training of an amateur author/painter or they may be a deliberate artistic choice of a master. Mark's style may reflect the former and Luke's the latter. Luke opens his version of the gospel with a single ornate sentence (*Ev.Luc.* 1.1–4) before transitioning to different styles, as if the author wishes to signal that he is capable of composing at a high level but is making a stylistic decision not to.

18 E.g. "The Lost Sheep" (*Ev.Luc.* 15.4–7; *Ev.Matt*. 18.12–14).

19 For initial observations, see Strong 2021, 245–247, 524–225, 530–531.

tive gospel to be written, and the Gospel according to Luke, which contains both the greatest density of fables and the most famous examples.[20]

3 Mark: sowing seeds of dissent

Composed sometime around the year 70 CE, Mark offers a text that has motivated several to draw comparisons with *The Life of Aesop*.[21] Despite the Aesopic resemblance in many other ways, Mark possesses the most modest fable tradition of the Synoptic gospels, with the primary examples in "The Sower" (*Ev.Marc.* 4.3–8), found in the block of comparisons in *Ev.Marc.* 4.1–34 and "The Wicked Tenants" (*Ev.Marc.* 12.1–12). In chapter 4, "The Sower" appears in a discourse that intertwines several threads picked up by later gospel authors. The first thread is the direct reference to teaching with this material, which is established in the introductory narrative:

> Καὶ πάλιν ἤρξατο διδάσκειν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν· καὶ συνάγεται πρὸς αὐτὸν ὄχλος πλεῖστος, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος πρὸς τὴν θάλασσαν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἦσαν. καὶ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς πολλὰ καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ· Ἀκούετε. ἰδοὺ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων σπεῖραι. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ σπείρειν ὃ μὲν ἔπεσεν παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν, καὶ ἦλθεν τὰ πετεινὰ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτό. καὶ ἄλλο ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸ πετρῶδες ὅπου οὐκ εἶχεν γῆν πολλήν, καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξανέτειλεν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς· καὶ ὅτε ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἥλιος ἐκαυματίσθη καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ῥίζαν ἐξηράνθη. καὶ ἄλλο ἔπεσεν εἰς τὰς ἀκάνθας, καὶ ἀνέβησαν αἱ ἄκανθαι καὶ συνέπνιξαν αὐτό, καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν. καὶ ἄλλα ἔπεσεν εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν καὶ ἐδίδου καρπὸν ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξανόμενα καὶ ἔφερεν ἓν τριάκοντα καὶ ἓν ἑξήκοντα καὶ ἓν ἑκατόν. καὶ ἔλεγεν· ὃς ἔχει ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω.
>
> (*Ev.Marc.* 4.1–9)

> Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in comparisons, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen and behold! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among

20 Tallying together all of Luke's immense corpus of comparisons, there are as many as around 50 total similes, proverbs, maxims, and fables. Using the narrow definition outlined above, there are around 20 fables in Luke, around 15 of which are unique to his gospel and which comprise around 40% of the word count in his "Travel Narrative" (9.52–19.10).

21 This is a tale for a different day. See Wills 1997; Shiner 1998; Elliot 2005; Watson 2010; Strong 2021 and most recently acknowledged from the classics side by Holzberg 2021, 13.

> thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
>
> (Transl. New Revised Standard Version adapted)

Transitioning from the intradiegetic narrative to the hypodiegetic fable with this opening exclamation, ἀκούετε ἰδοὺ ("Listen and behold!", 4.3), we find a close analogy in *The Life of Aesop.* In *Vit. Aesop.* 37 G, Aesop tells the fable of "The Gardener" to explain why weeds grow easily but it is difficult for the good seeds you want to grow. This fable he introduces in the different recensions by ἄκουε καὶ πρόσεχε or ἄκουον.[22] Following the fable, we return to the intradiegetic level of narration with an epimythium delivered to the public, ὃς ἔχει ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω ("He who has ears to hear, let him hear", 4.9).[23] This opaque quality of the epimythium — an anti-explanation — has analogies elsewhere in the first-century fable tradition that we will return to momentarily. Immediately following this epimythium, the plot advances to a different setting: Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο κατὰ μόνας, ἠρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα τὰς παραβολάς ("When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the comparisons", *Ev.Marc.* 4.10). What follows is an explanation of the clandestine function of fables for the Markan Jesus:

> καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται, ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν, καὶ ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν καὶ μὴ συνιῶσιν, μήποτε ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἀφεθῇ αὐτοῖς.
>
> (*Ev.Marc.* 4.11–12)

> And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of God's kingdom, but for those outside, everything comes in comparisons; in order that looking, they may look, but not see, and hearing, they may hear, but not comprehend; lest they turn and be forgiven."
>
> (Transl. J.S.)

Jesus then offers a fairly detailed allegorical explanation for "The Sower" to the students, followed by more comparisons for them to digest, which he specifies are

22 Recension MORN and BPthA, respectively, edited by Karla 2024 and 2001. In the G recension, the folio preserving this introduction and subsequent fable has been lost; however, σπείρω (the operative verb in *Ev.Marc.* 4) is mentioned in a sententia based on it (see Perry 1952, 249). The versions of the fable in the *collectio Augustana* (Aesop. 119 P. [= 121 Hsr.; 155 Ch.]), naturally, does not have this transition.

23 For detailed discussions of the rich and complex use of the promythium and epimythium in the gospel fables, see Strong 2021 and 2022.

analogies for the abstract concept of God's kingdom. The passage concludes with the notice:

> Καὶ τοιαύταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκούειν· χωρὶς δὲ παραβολῆς οὐκ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς, κατ᾽ ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυεν πάντα.
>
> (*Ev.Marc.* 4.33–34)

> And with many such comparisons he spoke the *logos* to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in comparisons, but he explained everything in private to his students.
>
> (Transl. J.S.)

Much like the author of *The Life of Aesop*, the Markan author has not historically been the recipient of praise for his literary talents. Major commentaries on Mark point out several apparent blunders in the author's composition of this passage. Guelich writes, "This passage sits awkwardly in its present context. It introduces a change of setting and audience from 4:1–2 that appears to have been forgotten in the concluding summary of 4:33–34 and the opening scene in 4:35–36. Although Jesus has just completed one parable (4:3–9), the disciples question him about 'parables' (4:10) and thus interrupt the sequence of parable (4:3–8) and interpretation (4:14–20)."[24] So bad are the infelicities that Collins, among others, concludes there must be two sources stitched together.[25] Like more recent scholarship discerning structure and greater finesse in *The Life of Aesop*,[26] others have attempted to show something more deliberate in Mark than a rhetorical jumble of traditions that were awkwardly patched together.[27] In what is perhaps the most detailed analysis of "The Sower" from an ancient rhetorical point of view, Strickland and Young discern a deliberate argument structure, including chiasms.[28] After the opening scene (*Ev.Marc.* 4.1–2), they discern a prelude (4.3a), exordium (the fable)

24 Guelich 1989, 199, and, e.g. Collins 2007, 239–240. At least concerning the plural παραβολάς, it seems to me that Mark may not refer to the narrative as a whole with the term, rather the παραβολαί are the individual allegorical correspondences. In other words, σπείρειν ("to sow") is a παραβολή for "spreading the 'word'", ὃ μὲν ἔπεσεν παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν ("the seed sown on the path") is a παραβολή for ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν, εὐθὺς ἔρχεται ὁ σατανᾶς καὶ αἴρει τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐσπαρμένον εἰς αὐτούς ("those who when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them."), and so on. This would also explain the plural for the single fable at *Ev.Marc.* 12.1, which is likewise highly allegorical.

25 Collins 2007, 239–240.

26 E.g. Holzberg 1992; Shiner 1998.

27 Mack argues for a deliberate structure following the chreia exercise of the *progymnasmata* (Mack/Robbins 1989, 143–161); see also Beavis 1989.

28 Strickland/Young 2017, 119–183.

(4.3–9), a *propositio* (4.11–12) that insiders see and hear but outsiders do not, and then a transition that the fable is key for understanding all of Jesus's comparisons (4.13). The next scene is made up then of three headings and an epilogue containing the allegorical interpretation and further comparisons that, taken together, mirror "The Sower", before concluding the unit at verse 34.[29] As some have argued, "The Sower" may express the message of the Markan Jesus as *mise en abyme* — a lesson about his lessons, an opaque fable about his opaque message.[30]

Whether communicated as a clumsy patchwork or a well-structured argument, the rhetorical goal of the fable at the intradiegetic story level and reader-audience level stand in tension. It serves two seemingly antithetical goals that have been no small puzzle to the relevant scholarship — to teach and to conceal.[31] The setting offers direct characterization of Jesus as a teacher, while it also claims that he employs the genre as coded speech intended for insiders. In this case, the two are combined so that Jesus's inner circle at the intradiegetic level and the implied readers at the extradiegetic level gain access to the clandestine lessons of the teaching. This clandestine aspect of Jesus's teaching in fables supports broader concerns in the gospel for mystery and a strong esoteric undercurrent, which include the characterization of the protagonist himself.[32] Untangling the two strands,[33] both find strong analogies in the fable tradition. Teaching with fables is a tradition discussed already by Socrates (Pl. *Resp*. 2.376e–377a) and one presumed to occur in any household (Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2). The potential for covert communication via fable was another well-known path to take, both in history and for communicating in literature between the fable teller and reader. Like Mark's "anti-explanation" epimythium mentioned above, we have several fable epimythia from Phaedrus reflecting insider-outsider language and a goal of obfuscating the application, e.g. *Hoc quo pertineat, dicet qui me nouerit.* ("Anyone who knows me will tell you what this [fable] refers to", 3.1.7 Z. [= G.]), *Hoc cur, Philete, scripserim, pulchre uides*. ("Why I have written this [fable], Philetus, you can see very well", 5.30 Z. [= 5.10 G.]), *Consulto inuoluit ueritatem antiquitas, | ut sapiens intellegeret, erraret rudis.* ("It was by design that antiquity wrapped up truth in symbols, that the wise might understand, the ignorant go astray", *app*. 6.17–18 Z. [= *app*. 7.17–18 G.]).

29 Strickland/Young 2017, 135.

30 Tolbert 1989; Strickland/Young 2017, 181: "the discourse is, as we have seen, actually a discourse about Jesus's discourses and how they are received."

31 See Lischer 2014, 43–68.

32 See the famous study of Wrede 1901.

33 Accepting for the moment that the passage reflects two independent traditions that were poorly integrated.

Linked to this mode of fable telling is the fable as subversive speech, which is found throughout *The Life of Aesop* and is tied to the very origin of the fable according to the (historically disputed) tradition conveyed by Phaedrus:[34]

> Nunc, fabularum cur sit inuentum genus,
> breui docebo. Seruitus obnoxia,
> quia quae uolebat non audebat dicere,
> affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit
> calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.
> (Phaed. 3 *prol.* 33–37 Z. [= G.])
>
> Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories.
>
> (Transl. Perry)

We find an analogous example of Aesop before a crowd, wishing to avoid being punished for telling the truth: οἱ δὲ ὄχλοι ἀνεκραύγασαν· "γνώμην δός." ὁ δὲ Αἴσωπος ἔφη· "γνώμην μὲν οὐ δώσω, λόγῳ δέ τινι λέξω ὑμῖν [...]." ("But the crowd shouted, 'Give us your opinion.' Aesop said, 'I will not give you advice but will speak in fable [...].'", *Vit. Aesop*. 93 G). The other prime example of the fable in the Gospel of Mark provides a stunning example of its use for subversive speech: "The Wicked Tenants".[35]

In the Synoptic Gospels, "The Wicked Tenants" occurs toward the end of the narrative once Jesus reaches Jerusalem and begins to engage in agonistic encounters with various authorities.[36] In *The Life of Aesop*, a similar situation is described. After telling a fable to sharply criticize the Delphians, ταῦτα εἰπὼν περὶ ἀποδημίαν ἐστέλλετο. οἱ δὲ ἄρχοντες ἰδόντες αὐτοῦ τὸ κακολόγον ἐλογίζοντο· "ἐὰν αὐτὸν ἀφῶμεν ἀποδημῆσαι, περιελθὼν εἰς τὰς ἑτέρας πόλεις πλεῖον ἀτιμοτέρους ἡμᾶς ποιήσει." ἐβουλεύσαντο οὖν ἀνελεῖν δόλῳ ("So saying, Aesop made preparations for his departure. But the officials, seeing how abusive he was, reasoned to themselves, 'If we let him get away, he will go around to other cities and damage our reputation. So they plotted to kill him by a trick'", *Vit. Aesop.* 126–127 G).

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34 This account of the origin and purpose of fables has been understood by some not as a general account bu as a metonymic reference to the slavery of Aesop in particular as progenitor of the genre (on which, see Gärtner 2021, 102–104). The constraints of space do not permit here a discussion of how the Jesus tradition reflects an authentic instantiation of this subaltern use of fables, but see Strong 2021, 255–291.

35 See e.g. Herzog 1998; Patterson 1991.

36 *Ev.Marc.* 12.1–12; *Ev.Matt*. 21.33–46; *Ev.Luc.* 20.9–19.

In the gospels, the fable is likewise told between several riddle tests and verbal traps laid by οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ("the chief priests, the experts in the law, and the elders", *Ev.Marc.* 11.27–33), and later by the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees (*Ev.Marc.* 12.13–27), who wish to arrest Jesus. In between these riddle tests, Jesus responds with "The Wicked Tenants":

> Καὶ ἤρξατο αὐτοῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖν· ἀμπελῶνα ἄνθρωπος ἐφύτευσεν καὶ περιέθηκεν φραγμὸν καὶ ὤρυξεν ὑπολήνιον καὶ ᾠκοδόμησεν πύργον καὶ ἐξέδετο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν. καὶ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς τοὺς γεωργοὺς τῷ καιρῷ δοῦλον ἵνα παρὰ τῶν γεωργῶν λάβῃ ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος· καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸν ἔδειραν καὶ ἀπέστειλαν κενόν. καὶ πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἄλλον δοῦλον· κἀκεῖνον ἐκεφαλίωσαν καὶ ἠτίμασαν. καὶ ἄλλον ἀπέστειλεν· κἀκεῖνον ἀπέκτειναν, καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους, οὓς μὲν δέροντες, οὓς δὲ ἀποκτέννοντες. ἔτι ἕνα εἶχεν υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν· ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν ἔσχατον πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγων ὅτι ἐντραπήσονται τὸν υἱόν μου. ἐκεῖνοι δὲ οἱ γεωργοὶ πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς εἶπαν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ κληρονόμος· δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἡμῶν ἔσται ἡ κληρονομία. καὶ λαβόντες ἀπέκτειναν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος. τί [οὖν] ποιήσει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος; ἐλεύσεται καὶ ἀπολέσει τοὺς γεωργοὺς καὶ δώσει τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἄλλοις. Οὐδὲ τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην ἀνέγνωτε· λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας· παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν; Καὶ ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν ὄχλον, ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν εἶπεν. καὶ ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ἀπῆλθον.
>
> (*Ev.Marc.* 12.1–12)

> And he began speaking to them with comparisons, "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?" And they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd, for they realized he told the illustration about them. So they left him and went away.
>
> (Transl. New Revised Standard Version adapted)

The fable is imbued with allegorical elements — the characters, locations, and plot events finding equivalents in the intradiegetic narrative. Jesus allegorizes the chief priests, the experts in the law, and elders as tenant farmers on a vineyard

that represents Israel.[37] The deity is the vineyard owner, his slaves are the prophets of biblical times, and Jesus is the beloved son. This degree of allegorization is fairly uncommon in the fable collections and other fables of Jesus, but does find strong affinities with the function of fables at the conclusion of *The Life of Aesop*. Like Aesop, Jesus has used the fable as a rhetorical device to augur his death at the hands of the authorities, to claim his innocence, to lay the culpability on his social superiors, and to assert his nearness to the deity.[38] The fable serves this end not only at the intra- but also the extradiegetic level of the reader. If "The Sower" represented Jesus's preaching *in nuce*, as Van Eck argues, "The Wicked Tenants" conveys the plot of the gospel *in nuce*.[39] For the sake of space, we must move on, but I offer further discussion of "The Wicked Tenants" vis-à-vis the fable tradition elsewhere.[40]

4 Luke: for certainty, edification, and entertainment

With the fable tradition in the Gospel of Luke, we have a horse of a different color. Written sometime around the end of the first or early second century, the apocalyptic expectations found in earlier gospels are minimized and the tradition of Jesus's figurative illustrations has had time to develop. It is especially in Luke's gospel that the fables at the intra- and extradiegetic levels function in ways resembling those fable collections with moral didactic components like Babrius and the *collectio Augustana*.[41] It is also especially in Luke's Gospel that Jesus uses fa-

37 The narrative of the fable is often allusive to Isaiah 5 and concludes with a direct citation of *Ps*. 118.22–23 (LXX *Ps*. 117). In much the same way, the fables at the end of *The Life of Aesop* draw upon ancient intertexts, appealing to some of the earliest fables from the Archaic and Classical periods, e.g. "The Eagle and the Beetle" (Aesop. 3 P. [= Hsr.; 4 Ch.]), which is possibly attested already in Semonides (see van Dijk 1997, 149–150; Adrados 2003, III 6–8).

38 In *The Life of Aesop*, one notes that the fables begin in rapid succession once Aesop is named a prophet (*Vit. Aesop.* 93 G) and so also does the appeal to Zeus take center stage (*Vit. Aesop.* 133–139 G).

39 Van Eck/van Aarde 1989.

40 Strong 2021, 255–291.

41 In Spielhofer's 2023 landmark study of Babrius, he has problematized many traditional views about the fable collection, including that the author's primary goal is moral-didactic in nature, noting the absence of epimythia among other things (see e.g. 74–75). Spielhofer has persuasively demonstrated that the author has a more complex set of ambitions and influences than once thought — a richness that cannot be captured simply with "a moral-didactic collection." Nevertheless, I see this as a matter of emphasis, with didactic expectations signaled in the prologues (e.g.

bles as an orator character, whose rhetorical objectives include both deliberative and forensic persuasion. Unlike the other gospels, the author states his explicit purpose at the beginning of the book, that he ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν … ("compiles a narrative …", 1.1) for his addressee Theophilus, ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν ("…so that you may have certainty concerning the things by which you were catechized", 1.4).[42]

At the intradiegetic story level, the protagonist is still portrayed with aspects of the subversive *picaro* outwitting social superiors as in the Markan gospel, but now the Lukan Jesus adopts elements of those social superiors to engage with them at eye level — he is now a literate, educated, wise man. The fables in Luke are inserted into appropriate narrative situations that support this elite characterization, on the one hand, and minimize the stigmas associated with fable telling that are a liability to this characterization on the other. Although the tradition is too important for Luke to omit, the covert aspect taken over from his predecessors in fables like "The Sower" is deemphasized and decentralized. The Lukan gospel omits, for example, the verse conveying that χωρὶς δὲ παραβολῆς οὐκ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς, κατ᾽ ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυεν πάντα ("he did not speak to them except in comparisons, but he explained everything in private to his students", *Ev.Marc.* 4.34; cf. *Ev.Matt*. 13.34–35). When the students ask Jesus for an explanation of "The Sower" (*Ev.Luc.* 8.9), rather than departing to share the hidden meaning in secret, Jesus simply delivers the epimythium while still standing amid the crowd, who are clearly within earshot. This kind of fable is also decentralized in its location in the plot. Once Jesus leaves the Galilee behind and begins his journey toward Jerusalem (9.51), he also leaves behind any trace of this coded speech mode of fable telling until he arrives at the destination ten chapters later (19.11).

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the father-son relationship of author and reader established by τέκνον and παῖ in 1 *prol.* 2, 2 *prol.* 1; the vocabulary and perhaps mimetic syntax of μάθοις […] γνοίης in 1 *prol.* 14; and the adjectives in 1 *prol.* 15 appealing to σοφοῦ γέροντος Αἰσώπου rather than an equally fitting appellation such as φρονίμου κακοπινοῦς Αἰσώπου). As to the epimythium specifically, the fables of Jesus sometimes do not have them and those that do are often assumed to be secondary by gospel scholars (who, again, are unaware of ancient fables and thus also the conventions of using an epimythium). Nevertheless, parable scholars have seen a didactic goal in Jesus's fables of teasing the mind into active thought, even when not dictating a particular lesson. This might prove to be a fruitful paradigm to think about Babrius's epimythium-less fables. Indeed, in one of the fables shared between Babrius, the *collectio Augustana*, and the Gospel of Luke, it is the version with the epimythium that the explicit lesson works against moral-didactic goals (Babr. 131; Aesop. 169 P. [= 179 Hsr.; 248 Ch.]; *Ev.Luc.* 15.11–32; on which, see Strong 2021, 325–330).

42 Like Babrius's "Son of King Alexander" (see Spielhofer 2023), it is possible that Theophilus, "God lover", is a metonym.

It is in the Central Section or "Travel Narrative" of the Lukan gospel (9.52–19.10), and only here in the gospel tradition, that one encounters what later history has made the prototypical corpus of "parables" — around fifteen unique fables that include "The Good Samaritan", "The Prodigal Son", "The Crafty Steward", "The Persistent Widow", and so on.[43] Unlike the other gospels, not a single fable here refers to "God's/heaven's kingdom." Instead, these fables are brought in as fictional analogies to address legal problems and cover *topoi* well-known from other fable collections, addressing greed, impiety, boasting, pride, justice, friendship, and cleverness. In the intradiegetic narrative, these fables function to validate Jesus in the offices of teacher and rhetor. At the level of implied readers, these fables likewise present an argument for a particular moral outlook through their appeal to Jesus as the authority figure who teaches these lessons. At the same time, if a collection of Jesus's fables was their source[44] — one of the instruments of the addressee's catechesis — weaving them into plausible narrative events in the life of Jesus would be a powerful method to achieve the author's goal of giving certainty to this catechesis.

In support of this characterization of the Lukan Jesus as a rhetor, one can do no better than the first fable of the "Travel Narrative": "The Good Samaritan". The fable is introduced by means of a legal debate between Jesus and a lawyer:

> Καὶ ἰδοὺ νομικός τις ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν λέγων· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις; ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης [τῆς] καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἰσχύϊ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ· ὀρθῶς ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποίει καὶ ζήσῃ. ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· καὶ τίς ἐστίν μου πλησίον; Ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἄνθρωπός τις κατέβαινεν ἀπὸ Ἰερουσαλὴμ.... τίς τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος εἰς τοὺς λῃστάς; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· πορεύου καὶ σὺ ποίει ὁμοίως.
>
> (*Ev.Luc.* 10.25–30a, 36–37)

43 This group often bearing the παραβολή label in "The Travel Narrative" is made up of texts composed with clear aspirations to the form and artistry of the fable, many of which have parallels to other known fables. They are greater in number than those in *The Life of Aesop* and they are identical to the fables that we encounter in the collections and embedded in other narratives. That this group of *exceptional* παραβολαί evolved into the *norm* during their reception is one root of the subsequent befuddlement about all texts labeled παραβολή in the Synoptic Gospels and the Sisyphean effort to carve out a new genre for them disconnected from fable that is called the "parable."

44 That Luke drew these fables from a collection has been a common argument; see Strong 2021, 449–522.

> And behold, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, saying, "A certain man was coming down from Jerusalem…[the Good Samaritan narrative]" "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."
>
> (Transl. New Revised Standard Version adapted)

By introducing the fable by way of a chreia, he has a natural way of weaving the fable into the intradiegetic narrative, situating it on a particular occasion that then governs the rhetorical force of the fable. In this case, after telling the fable, rather than delivering the epimythium himself, Jesus employs a clever rhetorical maneuver. He compels the opponent to render the verdict with his own lips in Jesus's favor. Jesus has outmaneuvered the lawyer with this short fictional narrative illustrating the truth and cemented his credentials in so doing.

Scholars generally recognize an effort to involve the implied readership in the gospel narratives. However, the question of degree, in what ways, and to what ends is debated and certainly differs from gospel to gospel.[45] In the case of Luke and his fables, it is transparently the case that the implied readers are also wrapped into the paraenesis of the epimythia. One illustrative example from Luke 14 will have to suffice. While Jesus reclines at a dinner, one of the other guests says to him: μακάριος ὅστις φάγεται ἄρτον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ ("blessed is he who will eat bread in God's kingdom", 14.15), to which Jesus responds with the fable of "The Great Banquet" (14.16–24). The fable narrative concludes with καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον· ἔξελθε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ φραγμοὺς καὶ ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν, ἵνα γεμισθῇ μου ὁ οἶκος· λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων τῶν κεκλημένων γεύσεταί μου τοῦ δείπνου (14.23–24). To whom κύριος and δοῦλον correspond depends on the narrative level(s) at which they occur, and so too does how one punctuates the sentence determine the narrative level. The question is whether the transition from hypo- back to intradiegetic occurs at the end of this text or already at λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν. If the latter, who would that epimythium address, the fellow banqueter or the gospel readers at the extradiegetic level?

45 The bibliography on such issues is legion, but see e.g. Malbon 2009; Dicken/Snyder 2016.

> [hypodiegetic fable:] "[…] The master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and hedges, and insist people come in, so that my house may be filled. [implicit endomythium:] For I [master] tell you [slave], none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"
> [hypodiegetic fable:] "[…] The master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and hedges, and insist people come in, so that my house may be filled.'" [intradiegetic epimythium:] For I [Jesus] tell you [fellow banqueter], none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.
> [hypodiegetic fable:] "[…] The master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and hedges, and insist people come in, so that my house may be filled."' [extradiegetic epimythium:] For I [Jesus] tell you [Christian audience], none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.[46]

While one would be justifiably skeptical of attributing authorial intentions like directly addressing the implied reader, the grammar requires it in this case. It is a master speaking to one slave at the hypodiegetic level, and Jesus addresses the fable and its epimythium to one dinner guest at the intradiegetic level. It is only at the extradiegetic level, addressing the early Christian audience, that the plural ὑμῖν ("you all") is grammatically correct.[47] The message thus functions at all three levels, each bearing its own meaning. While such complexity need not always be at play, the refrain λέγω ὑμῖν ("I tell you") and similar formulations spoken by the gospel Jesus when uttering epimythia aid the author in blending the narrative levels to include the implied readership among addressees. This reader orientation, perhaps absent from fables embedded into other narrative genres, reflects the function of fables in ancient education and resemble the epimythia in the fable collections with their regular authorial "I"s and direct addressee "you"s.

These fables of "The Travel Narrative", when compared with those embedded in other narratives, but especially those in the collections, show that the author and/or his source understood and aspired to the conventions of the fable genre as reflected in those texts and in the techniques described by rhetorical handbooks. The fables of Luke's "Travel Narrative" are characterized by beginning with the protagonist as an anarthrous noun with a *pronomen indefinitum*, a tripart structure, ornamental narrative details, promythia and epimythia that follow expected patterns, and direct speech events, which include dialogue, concluding summary remarks, and soliloquies that reflect character interiority on familiar fable topics like expressions of distress and inner deliberations.[48] The fable of "The Foolish Farmer" (*Ev.Luc.* 12.16–22) offers a superb example of all of the aforementioned

46 Since the original invitees within the fable were landowners who are now substituted for the poor and disabled, the social background of the audience is once again in view.

47 This address to the audience has been noted by gospel scholars, who, it is worth remembering, were unaware of the ancient fable and the epimythium (e.g. Linnemann 1967, 90; Nolland 1989, 758–59; Hultgren 2000, 338).

48 On the consistency of these features in fables, see Holzberg 2002, 20–21.

features working together. It appears following a request for Jesus to resolve another legal dispute, Εἶπεν δέ τις ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, εἰπὲ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἄνθρωπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς; ("Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to split the inheritance with me.' But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?'", *Ev.Luc.* 12.13–14). This chreia serves as a springboard for the protagonist to respond to the perceived greed of the inquirer, using a fable to illustrate the point:

> (15) Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· [promythium:] ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστιν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ. (16) Εἶπεν δὲ παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγων· [fable:] ἀνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα. (17) καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων· τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου; (18) καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτο ποιήσω, καθελῶ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ μείζονας οἰκοδομήσω καὶ συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθά μου (19) καὶ ἐρῶ τῇ ψυχῇ μου· ψυχή, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλά· ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου. (20) εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ θεός· ἄφρων, ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ τὴν ψυχήν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ· ἃ δὲ ἡτοίμασας, τίνι ἔσται; (21) [epimythium:] [οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ καὶ μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν.] (22) Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς [αὐτοῦ]· διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν· [epimythium:] μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι τί ἐνδύσησθε. (23) ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ πλεῖόν ἐστιν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος
>
> (*Ev.Luc.* 12.15–23)

> And he said to them, [promythium:] "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a fable, saying [fable:] "A certain rich man's land produced abundantly. And he deliberated with himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' But God said to him, 'Fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. The things you have prepared, whose will they be?' [epimythium:] [So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."] He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, [epimythium:] do not worry about your life/soul, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life/soul is more than food, and the body more than clothing.
>
> (Transl. J.S.)

One could not locate in the fable collections a better fable form, plot, and structure than this. It opens with an anarthrous noun + a *pronomen indefinitum*, describes a foolish character who enters into a soliloquy, and concludes with a reply from a supernatural *survenant* who censures the protagonist, all wrapped together in a comic plot. Following the fable, we arrive at an epimythium, which begins

with a typical form, οὕτως + maxim.[49] Then we have a second epimythium, this time with a narrative transition added to specify that Jesus delivers it to his students. Just as in the fable collection manuscripts, one even detects scribes in dispute over the interpretation of the fable, scribbling in (or scratching out) an epimythium in the middle of the narrative.[50]

At the level of the intradiegetic narrative, the fable is used to justify Jesus's rebuff of the man who appealed to him as adjudicator — the promythium stating that one should avoid any kind of greed. Between the chreia and the promythium, the number of addressees switches to the plural, enabling Jesus's exhortation to include the students and implied readers. As several scholars have argued, these verses form the springboard into a cohesive rhetorical argument that continues for much of the chapter and which is illuminated by ancient rhetorical strategies. Malherbe sees a discussion of the topos on greed (περί πλεονεχία).[51] Stigall observes parallels with the strategies recommended in *progymnasmata* handbooks for embedding fables and characterization through prosopopoiea.[52] Stegman also appeals to the *progymnasmata*, observing that Hermogenes's recommendations for chreia elaboration can serve as a template "in order to highlight and clarify the flow and logic of the Lukan Jesus' discourse in these verses:

1. 12.13 brief encomium (Jesus is the recipient of a request and given the honorific title 'Teacher')
2. 12.13–15a Jesus' chreia ('Who made me κριτής and μεριστής? Beware of all covetousness')
3. 12.15b rationale ('because life does not consist in abundance of possessions')
4. 12.16–20 statement of the contrary (parable of the rich fool)

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49 With dozens of examples, this formulation is one of the most frequently used in the epimythia of the *collectio Augustana* (e.g. Aesop. 2, 4, 7, 14 P. [= Hsr.; 5, 8, 14, 39 Ch.]). It also occasionally appears in fables embedded into other prose works, such as the following example from Plutarch, which expresses not only the same form but also offers a similar maxim on the topic of possessions: Οὕτω δή, ὦ φίλε Χερσία, καὶ πρὸς ἄνθρωπον ἀνόητον καὶ φαῦλον οὐδέν ἐστι μέτρον οὐσίας· ("My dear Chersias, so also indeed is there no amount of possessions that can be applied to a foolish and worthless person", *Sept. Sap. Conv*. 157b; transl. J.S.).

50 Verse 21 is absent from Codex Bezae and from the version at *Ev.Thom.* 63. With the newly published second-century Oxyrhynchus fragment also omitting this maxim while preserving the surrounding verses, my suspicion that verse 21 is an epimythium added later has still more support (Fish/Wallace/Holmes 2023).

51 Malherbe 1996 and see the contribution to his *Festschrift* continuing this argument (Hock 2003).

52 Taking note of Hermogenes's discussion of the nature of ethical speech, and the example οἷον τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους γεωργὸς πρῶτον ἰδὼν ναῦν ('What a farmer would say when first seeing a ship, *Prog.* 9.30), Stigall suggests, "The scene in Luke's parable could be categorized similarly as: 'What words a farmer might say when his fields produced a bountiful crop?'" (2012, 357).

5. 12.24–28 statement from analogy (ravens and lilies)
6. 12.30a; 12.27 example ('Gentiles'/'nations' — example; Solomon — positive example)
7. 12.30b–32 statement from authority (Jesus' knowledge of God's will and good pleasure)
8. 12.33 closing exhortations ('Sell your possessions and give alms; store up treasure in heaven')"[53]

Whatever the best way is to parse the rhetorical structure, many intertextual links join the fable with lexica and themes that appear in the subsequent verses.[54] By constructing the chapter this way, the extradiegetic author and his protagonist flex their rhetorical prowess, building an argument to convince the students within and outside the gospel narrative. Here, the fable provides a fitting fictional example to support the other illustrations and forms in the chapter, such as condemning greed, praising generosity, and promoting, perhaps, *enkrateia*. Ironically, Jesus rebuffs his role as judge and advocate by employing the fable precisely as someone well-trained in the art.[55]

For all of the Lukan author's evident literary talents, the roughness of the Greek when editing in fables leaves a strong impression of a source being worked in.[56] We saw this above when an awkward narrative transition from a fable to an epimythium results in repetition: Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς [αὐτοῦ]· διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν· ("He said to the students, 'therefore I say to you'", 12.22). We find a similar repetition of addressees in chapter 18 when integrating a promythium, αὐτοῖς ("to them") and αὐτοὺς ("them"): Ἔλεγεν δὲ παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ μὴ ἐγκακεῖν. ("And he told a fable to them [promythium:] on the need for them always to pray and not to be remiss", 18.1). To

53 Stegman 2007, 335–336.

54 "Life/soul", which appears in the fable and the subsequent epimythia, returns in arguments from the inability to extend one's life by worrying (25–26). Sandwiched between these in verse 24 is a comparison with ravens that references sowing, reaping, storehouses, and barns. The deity from verse 20 reappears in verse 28 for Jesus to make an *a minori ad maius* point that God cares even for grass and animals, *ergo* humans much more. Eating and drinking from verse 19 reappear in 29, ὑπάρχοντα ("possessions") from verse 16 reappears in 33, and θησαυρὸν ἀνέκλειπτον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (storing up "unfailing treasure in heaven") rather than earthly goods in verses 33–34 picks up on the epimythium from verse 21.

55 This characterization of Jesus as lawyer extends to other framing narratives to uniquely Lukan examples such as "The Prodigal Son" in *Ev.Luc.* 15.1–2 (see e.g. Bovon 2013, 401).

56 Based on Demetr. *Eloc.* 240–301, Strickland/Young 2017, 173–174, argue that it is a deliberate style, but I am doubtful.

begin the next fable, he cleverly transforms the preposition πρὸς, the first word of a Greek promythium (meaning "on [the topic of]"),[57] into "to", the object marker for the verb of speaking: Εἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρός τινας τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην· ("And he also said [promythium:] to those who are confident in themselves that they are just while treating others with contempt, this fable", 18.9). When multiple fables come one after another like this, the Lukan author often fails to divide them by any narrative event or supplies only the most superficial transitions. We see this also with "The Lost Sheep", "The Lost Coin", "The Prodigal Son", and "The Crafty Steward", which are simply divided by ἤ (15.8), εἶπεν δέ (15.11), and ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς (16.1), respectively. Likewise, the transition points between a fable and its epimythium and between multiple epimythia are frequently asyndetic, as if one were looking at a fable collection manuscript rather than a running narrative.[58] At the level of the plot, before an opening chreia or after a fable, the scene can change as if the one adjacent to it never happened. When an epimythium finishes in 18.14, suddenly people are bringing infants to Jesus in 18.15. Within *The Life of Aesop*, by contrast, fables are normally well integrated into the plot, such that, if indeed the narrative was constructed in a similar way to the Gospels, the seams between a diegesis or chreia and the fables are not easily visible — well blended so to speak.[59] Even the shortest transition between two fables offers at least a modicum of narrative progress: μέλλων δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ κρημνοῦ ῥίπτεσθαι ἔτι ἕτερον λόγον εἶπεν· ("As he was on the point of being thrown over the cliff he told still another fable", *Vit. Aesop.* 141 G).

For Luke, there does appear to be a broader strategy at play in integrating fables. Emanating outward from the central block of fables anchored in chapter 15, Luke then spaces his fables out. They appear at regular intervals from chapter 6 until 20. As Parsons argues, Luke inserts fables from his collection in this manner as an orienting framework in the "Travel Narrative", "landmarks for instructing the disciples along the way."[60] I would also attribute to the author a complementary rhetorical goal in this distribution strategy. As many of our first-century sources remind us, fables edified and entertained, like a sauce for a dish, used in

57 Insofar as we can reconstruct a normal Greek promythium; see Perry 1940; Strong 2022.

58 See, for example, the epimythia stacked behind "The Crafty Steward" (*Ev.Luc.* 16.8–13), many of which have no connecting words between them. See again the more detailed discussions in Strong 2021 and 2022.

59 See Shiner 1998; Elliott 2005.

60 Parsons 2007, 122; Parsons 1997. Naturally, the "disciples" include implied readers.

moderation they maintained the reader's interest while instructing them.[61] These instructions through fable are delivered by the master teacher, Jesus, whose characterization is reinforced by this fable *savoir-faire*.

5 Conclusion

Taken together, there are perhaps more fables embedded into the gospels than any other Greek work. With these few illustrative examples, one gets a sense of the purposes for weaving them into the gospels and the methods for doing so. The rhetorical function of fables in the gospels reflects their broad use elsewhere in antiquity, with observable tendencies from one gospel version to the next. Fables are used here to support a particular characterization of the fable teller and his hearers. They are used as a means to convey a hidden transcript and subversive speech, inviting readers in on the secret. They are used as a rhetorical tool to make arguments in favor of a point of view or legal position. They are used to teach in the sense of explaining abstract concepts like "God's kingdom" and to teach in the sense of paraenesis — cautionary or exhortatory illustrations that promote particular ethical norms or moral behaviors. For all of these goals, the fable is an ideal genre with universal appeal to mediate between audiences of all backgrounds.

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61 μεθ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἐνθουσιῶσι […] ὥσπερ ὄψῳ χρωμένους μετρίως τῷ τέρποντι ("they get inspired and pleasure … just as a sauce used in moderation brings pleasure", Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 14f). See also Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19; Phaed. 1 *prol.* 1–4 Z. [= G.]; Dio Chrys. *Or*. 72.13.

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Montserrat Camps-Gaset

The Role of Animals in the *Acta Thomae*

Abstract: The *Acta Thomae* is a 3rd-century text consisting of several episodes about the Apostle Thomas. In some chapters the main characters are animals. Some of these are given a human language, and their speech conveys a moral message, as in a fable. An analysis is offered of the contrast between the asses in *Act. Thom.* 4 & 8 and the tradition of donkeys in fable or comedy, as well as of notions of rational vs. irrational and the Ancient Greek intellectual debate over animal rationality. Act 3 features a speaking snake, an animal with evil connotations in Greek literature. The literary background of *Act. Thom.* is formed not only by the Hebrew sources of Christianity, but also by the Greek texts of fables or the pantomime, and it is important to analyse how the new Christian message is embodied in the old literary tradition.

1 Introduction

The role of speaking animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles has often been highlighted.[1] Here we consider the background to the appearance of animals in the Acts of the Apostle Thomas. *Acta Thomae* is a work, probably of the 3rd century, consisting of several episodes around a main character, the Apostle Thomas, commonly considered to be the evangelist of India.[2] Although the term 'novel' is much disputed where Christian writings are concerned, the work takes the form of a Christian story as a kind of novel, with many adventures, miracles, and subplots, some of them quite independent, with the character of Thomas as a common feature in them all. This kind of story recalls the Aesop Romance, an anonymous text close in time to the Apocryphal Acts and a tale that features quite different episodes around a main character, Aesop; fables play a great role in it and most of the adventures lead to some kind of moral conclusion. In a similar way, in the Apocryphal Acts of Thomas, a very humble apostle, sometimes disguised as a beggar, sometimes sold as a slave, always performs great deeds and

1 Matthews 1999 is one of the best papers on the topic.

2 To this day, the reference edition for *Act. Thom.* is still Lipsius-Bonnet 1898, 99–288, pending a new critical edition. An English translation with introduction is found in Pick 1908, 225–362. An important commentary on the text, with an English translation, is Klijn 2003. A more recent English translation is Attridge/Hills 2010.

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miracles or utters wise speeches. They are usually considered to have arisen, at least partially, in a Gnostic context,[3] with one of their main threads being support for strict continence, like the Encratites.[4]

In some episodes, animals play a major role. The relationship of the Apostle to certain animals has a moral aim, and they are not mere partners or secondary characters in the plot, but are crucial for the doctrinal lesson of each passage. Some of these animals are even given a language similar to that of humans, and their speech and attitude convey the moral of the Apostle's preaching.

We shall not focus on the possible spiritual meanings of these animals from the point of view of the Christian message of the book, but on the reception of these stories by an audience containing both literate and illiterate people. The Acts are not sophistic literature, there are no complicated compositional elements such as are found in the novels of the Second Sophistic, and they are not a cultivated piece of knowledge such as the writings of Tatian or Origen. They are plain stories (which is not to say a plain doctrine), simple narratives which, if taken only at face value, may be quite easy to understand. Matthews calls it a "proletarian literature"[5] and indeed they are far removed from the educated texts of the 3rd century. On the other hand, there are many possible layers of interpretation, and the simplicity of the text should not preclude a deeper understanding.

But even if we take into account this apparent formal simplicity, we might ask ourselves about the audience and the reception of such a text. The current interpretations mainly seek the Christian or Jewish-Christian context of meaning,[6] because, among other reasons, *Act. Thom.* are supposed to have originated in a Syriac environment,[7] although the Acts are written in Greek and were read (and heard) in Greek. The audience may well have been acquainted with other works

3 The Gnostics were groups claiming a special knowledge of God and Salvation. They believed in a supreme perfect God and a malevolent, lesser divinity, who created matter, which is evil. There was a strong controversy in the Early Church regarding these groups. For the Gnostic connections of *Act. Thom.*, cf. Bornkamm 1964, 300.

4 The Encratites (or "self-controlled") were 2nd-century Christians who supported a very extreme ascetic life, forbidding sex and meat, and drinking only water. They were mostly related to Gnostic sects. Many prominent Christian intellectuals (such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, or Hippolytus of Rome) considered them heretical.

5 Matthews 1999, 205.

6 Bornkamm 1964; Klijn 2003; Adamik 2001, regarding the serpent.

7 According to van Dijk 1996 and Bremmer 2001, 78, though other opinions on the subject are possible. See Roig Lanzillotta 2015; Narro/Muñoz Gallarte 2022.

of commonly known literature and with the tradition of some Greek story-characters. This is where animals and fables play a significant role.[8]

Speaking animals are a feature of fables, and often dialogue occurs between a human and an animal, or if there is no dialogue there is some kind of interaction. Even if they do not speak, some animals already have a reputation, not only in fables but also in Greek literature, and they are part of the audience's traditional background.

Therefore, it is not obvious that the episodes of the Acts should be understood only in a spiritual or Christian sense, especially since they are non-liturgical texts, aiming to convey Christian knowledge through a narrative rich in adventures.[9] In the 3rd century, and even in the fourth, Christianity was a powerful religious trend but was immersed in a polytheistic context, in which cultural references were not established univocally. Orality still played a great role in learning, not only because most people were illiterate, but because even among cultivated people reading aloud or learning by listening was usual.[10] In people's educational background, a great deal of knowledge was stored by hearing, seeing performances at the theatre or at the pantomime, telling tales and stories, listening to readings, and chattering in families' private rooms. We rely on extant texts and archaeology to find out what the ancients thought, knew, believed, and feared, but a large proportion of their actual points of reference is lost because they were not recorded in any material medium. In the 3rd century, this immaterial knowledge was composed of the tradition of classical authors and the innovation of Christian stories. Although the Christian texts of the Old and New Testament were widespread and read during liturgies, they may not yet have been so well known as to form a mass of immediately remembered material. Christianity at that time was a novelty, not a deep-rooted *Weltanschauung*. All kinds of memories and tales merged in a single image when listening to a Christian text, and other popular stories such as the Acts added more content to the sometimes bare narratives of the liturgy. Fables as part of the Graeco-Roman literary background are thus also present in the reading of Christian texts. Speaking animals may have raised certain expectations in a reader who had an image of the animal's role both in fables and in other allegorical or symbolic works such as the *Physiologus*.

Certainly, the following episodes of *Act. Thom.* are not properly fables and have at first sight an obvious precedent in Old or New Testament texts, at least for

8 It is even possible to think of a Syriac origin for Babrius' fables in the 2nd–3rd century. Cf. Spielhofer 2023, 12–18, and Luzzato 1997, 383.

9 Spittler 2012, 65; Pervo 1987.

10 Cf. especially Upton 2006.

the modern reader; but for the ancient audience, the available meaning was much wider, and this is what we try to present here.

2 Speaking animals in *Act. Thom.*

2.1 The ass

There are three main episodes where speaking animals play a significant role in *Act. Thom.*: Act 3, with the snake; Act 4, with the foal of an ass; and Act 8, with wild asses and the long speech of a single ass. Act 4 and Act 8 often share features and they are sometimes taken to be doublets by some critics.[11] Many allegorical interpretations have been offered for both episodes, mainly by Bornkamm, who sees the colt in Act 4 as an allegory of the human body, and Spittler, who interprets both animals (the domestic and the wild one) as opposites and as an allegory of sexual continence.[12] Given the Encratite character of *Act. Thom.*, this approach is not impossible, but it may not be the only one or, at least, some nuances could be added to it.

Generally in Greek Antiquity asses were supposed to be stupid animals, bearing a great burden and all kinds of misfortunes in life for a minimal reward (or no reward at all). In Aristophanes' *Ranae*, the initial scene has Xanthias on a donkey playing jokes on Dionysus. It is an everyday scene: asses are expected to silently carry human beings and burdens. Xanthias complains about his own burden, although he is comfortably riding on the ass. He also complains of his lack of participation in the Mysteries, and he feels 'like an ass': νὴ τὸν Δί᾽ ἐγὼ γοῦν ὄνος ἄγω μυστήρια ("I'm the damn donkey who carries out the Mysteries", Ar. *Ran.* 159; transl. Henderson). According to Aristophanes, Apollo made ass's ears grow on Midas on account of his bad choice of music: νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς Μίδαις μὲν οὖν, ἢν ὦτ᾽ ὄνου λάβητε ("O yes, you'll all be Midases if only you've the asses' ears", Ar. *Plut.* 287; transl. Rogers). Ass's ears are still seen a sign of stupidity today! However, donkeys were considered no better in proverbs and sayings: περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς ("for the shadow of an ass") means 'for a trifle, for nothing', as in Plato:

> ὅταν οὖν ὁ ῥητορικὸς ἀγνοῶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακόν, λαβὼν πόλιν ὡσαύτως ἔχουσαν πείθῃ, μὴ περὶ "ὄνου σκιᾶς" ὡς ἵππου τὸν ἔπαινον ποιούμενος, ἀλλὰ περὶ κακοῦ ὡς ἀγαθοῦ, δόξας δὲ

11 Cf. the very interesting approach of Spittler 2008, 220–222.

12 Cf. Bornkamm 1933, 37; Spittler 2008, 211–212.

πλήθους μεμελετηκὼς πείσῃ κακὰ πράττειν ἀντ᾽ ἀγαθῶν, ποῖόν τιν᾽ ἂν οἴει μετὰ ταῦτα τὴν ῥητορικὴν καρπὸν ὧν ἔσπειρε θερίζειν;

(Pl. *Phdr*. 260c–d)

Socrates: Then when the orator who does not know what good and evil are undertakes to persuade a state which is equally ignorant, not by praising the "shadow of an ass" under the name of a horse, but by praising evil under the name of good, and having studied the opinions of the multitude persuades them to do evil instead of good, what harvest do you suppose his oratory will reap thereafter from the seed he has sown?

(Transl. Fowler)

Plato goes on quoting (and modifying)[13] another proverb, ἀπ᾽ ὄνου καταπεσεῖν ("as if you had fallen from an ass"; transl. Hickie; or "I'd say you fell off your rocker", Ar. *Nub*. 1273; transl. Henderson), as a way to stress someone's clumsiness. Cf. also κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἀπό τινος ὄνου πεσεῖν ("get a toss off the donkey [as the saying goes]", Pl. *Leg.* 701d; transl. Bury).

The animal also has an element of wantonness, as in Xenophon: ὁμολογῶ καὶ τῶν ὄνων ὑβριστότερος εἶναι, οἷς φασιν ὑπὸ τῆς ὕβρεως κόπον οὐκ ἐγγίγνεσθαι ("I admit that I am more wanton even than the ass, which, because of its wantonness, so the saying runs, is not subject to fatigue", Xen. *An.* 5.8.3; transl. Brownson).

Also wanton and uncomplaining is the ass of Semonides' *Iambs about Women fr*. 7.43–49 West, quite different from asses in Aesop, which are more envious of other people's fortunes, but as stubborn or clumsy as his Aristophanic relatives (Aesop. 82 P. [= 84 Hsr.; 269 Ch.]; 149 P. [= 154 Hsr.; 210 Ch.]), or ridiculous (151 P. [= 156 Hsr.; 209 Ch.]). Onagers (wild asses) are not much better in fables: their main characteristics are being bad company or lacking perspicacity (Babr. 67).

The fable about a donkey carrying a statue deserves special mention.

ὄνῳ τις ἐπιθεὶς ἄγαλμα ἤλαυνεν εἰς πόλιν. πάντων δὲ τῶν συναντώντων προσκυνούντων τῷ ἀγάλματι ὑπολαβὼν ὁ ὄνος, ὅτι αὐτῷ προσκυνοῦσιν, ἀναπτερωθεὶς ὠγκᾶτο καὶ οὐκέτι περαιτέρω προβαίνειν ἐβούλετο. καὶ ὁ ὀνηλάτης αἰσθόμενος τὸ γεγονὸς τῷ ῥοπάλῳ αὐτὸν παίων ἔφη· "ὦ κακὴ κεφαλή, ἔτι καὶ τοῦτο λοιπὸν ἦν ὄνον ὑπ᾽ ἀνθρώπων προσκυνεῖσθαι."

(Aesop. 182 P. [= 193 Hsr.; 267 Ch.])

Someone put an image of a god on an ass and led him to the city. Along the way many people meeting them bowed down to the image, and the ass, thinking that they were bowing to him, was puffed up with pride, brayed loudly, and refused to advance any farther. When the driver saw what had happened he beat the ass with a club, saying: "Miserable creature, did this too remain for me to experience, to behold you, an ass, bowed down to by men?"

(Transl. Perry)

13 At least, that is what Timaeus Sophista says, *Lexicon Platonicum* 977b.

He feels particularly proud of (supposedly) being adored by the crowd, which is actually adoring the statue. He is carrying not a man, as he usually does, but the image of a god, and thinks himself the object of veneration. Being preposterous and overvaluing his own qualities is another form of *hybris*, as of stupidity.

In *Act. Thom.*, Act 4, the colt, son of an ass, plays the opposite role: he wants to carry a man who, by his (the colt's) own confession, is the image of divinity, i.e. the representative of God. He is aware of the Apostle's identity:[14]

> Ὁ δίδυμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ ἀπόστολος τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ συμμύστης τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἀποκρύφου, ὁ δεχόμενος αὐτοῦ τὰ ἀπόκρυφα λόγια, ὁ συνεργὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃς ἐλεύθερος ὢν γέγονας δοῦλος καὶ πραθεὶς πολλοὺς εἰς ἐλευθερίαν εἰσήγαγες· ὁ συγγενὴς τοῦ μεγάλου γένους τοῦ τὸν ἐχθρὸν καταδικάσαντος καὶ τοὺς ἰδίους λυτρωσαμένου, ὁ πρόφασις τῆς ζωῆς πολλοῖς γενόμενος ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἰνδῶν· ἦλθες γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς πλανωμένους ἀνθρώπους […].
>
> (*Act. Thom.* 39.1)

> Twin of the Messiah and Apostle of the Most High, and sharer in the hidden word of the Life-giver, and receiver of the secret mysteries of the Son of God; freeborn, who became a slave, to bring many to freedom by your obedience; son of a great family, who became bereaved, that by the power of your Lord, you might deprive the enemy of many, so that you might become the cause of life to the country of the Indians; (you) who came against your will to men who were straying from God […].
>
> (Transl. Klijn)

And his faith is far more robust than that of the other followers or companions of the Apostle. The ass, instead of complaining about the burden of a rider, insists on having Thomas on his back. The Apostle, at first, does not acknowledge the animal as a speaking partner: his first words are to praise God. But then he turns to the ass and asks about his origins and the reason for his speech. The ass's lineage goes back as far as Balaam's, and he also recalls that one of his ancestors was ridden by Jesus entering Jerusalem. The animal insists on having Thomas on his back, whereas usually asses do not appreciate bearing a burden. In the end, the Apostle reluctantly rides the donkey, because he is not Jesus, but from the ass's point of view the honour of being ridden by him is comparable to that of his ancestor.

As Susanne Talabardon has pointed out, asses play a very positive role in the Jewish tradition. They are often "entscheidende Wendepunkte des Geschehens

14 Here we follow the Greek version only. In the Syriac version, the Apostle prays that speech be given to the ass. It is not absolutely clear that the Syriac version is older, as recent research postulates a Greek origin for *Act. Thom.*, cf. Narro/Muñoz Gallarte 2022; Roig Lanzillotta 2015.

zwischen dem Ewigen und seinem Volk."[15] Probably *Act. Thom.* is no exception, but it is a Greek text, originating in a Gnostic context and targeting an audience far wider than just Jews (or perhaps with no Jews at all in it). The resonance of the stories about asses was not with the Berakhot or rabbinic literature,[16] which would have been quite unknown outside Jewish circles, but with the more widespread and familiar tales of stubborn or stupid animals as they appear in fable literature, although even fable offers intelligent asses, as in Phaed. *app*. 12 Z. [= *app*. 14 G.].

The whole passage looks like a reversal of the usual character of an ass: instead of being stupid and clumsy, he is perceptive and discerning, instead of knowing nothing or thinking slowly, he is sharp and clear-eyed, his knowledge of divine things is far superior to that of the humans in this chapter. Speaking asses in Greek literature (especially in fables) are far from clever, but the well-educated ass in this episode would certainly remind a Christian audience, familiar with the liturgical texts of the Old Testament, of Balaam;[17] however, in the 3rd century these were not (and perhaps not primarily) the sole point of reference or relevant background. For the Greek audience of *Act. Thom.*, asses were asses, both the Aristophanic or the Aesopic ones, they were the dumb characters of the proverbs or the shameful punishment of a stupid deed. Nobody would expect a donkey to recognize the power of God in the way this one does, so the contrast is all the more striking; in fact, he must explicitly recall its biblical ancestors, which perhaps has a didactic aim. It is certainly a Christian text, but in the 3rd century the common Christian background was perhaps not as common as it would be a couple of centuries later, so the ass's lineage would not have been part of the audience's immediate memories. Every Greek listener or reader could easily associate asses in a text with stupidity, but not necessarily every Greek listener or reader would have immediately associated an ass with Balaam or Palm Sunday. These are the centuries when a new intellectual background was arising, in what could be called the 'substitution of mythologies'. The contrast between the ordinary image of an ass and the role of this particular ass (however noble his ancestors

15 Talabardon 2013, 114 ("decisive turning points in the events between the Eternal One and his people").

16 The Berakhot (Blessings) is a Jewish treatise on blessings and prayers and their liturgical use, composed in the first two centuries of the CE, i.e. quite close to the Christian Apocryphal Acts.

17 LXX *Nu*. 22.28–35.

were) is therefore sharper and more shocking, and makes the message more impressive.[18]

2.2 The onager

Something similar can be said about Act 8, which Spittler reads as a doublet of the one discussed above,[19] although we find a great difference between them. In Act 8, the animals are wild asses, which again play a very different role from that of humans — more enlightened, cultivated, and cleverer than the people in the story.

Onagers make fewer appearances than asses in Greek literature. They belong to the wild, whereas the humble donkey is the most punished animal of the household. The thoughtful onager of Aesop's fable 183 P. [= 194 Hsr.; 265 Ch.], who reckons he is luckier than his sleek but overworked cousin, signifies this qualitative distance, which is also presented in the episode of *Act. Thom.*[20]

> ὄνος ἄγριος ὄνον ἥμερον θεασάμενος ἔν τινι εὐηλίῳ τόπῳ προσελθὼν ἐμακάριζεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῇ εὐεξίᾳ τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῇ τῆς τροφῆς ἀπολαύσει. ὕστερον δὲ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀχθοφοροῦντα καὶ τὸν ὀνηλάτην ὄπισθεν ἑπόμενον καὶ ῥοπάλοις αὐτὸν παίοντα εἶπεν· "ἀλλ' ἔγωγε οὐκέτι σε εὐδαιμονίζω. ὁρῶ γάρ, ὅτι οὐκ ἄνευ κακῶν μεγάλων τὴν ἀφθονίαν ἔχεις."
>
> (Aesop. 183 P. [= 194 Hsr.; 265 Ch.])

> A wild ass, seeing a tame one in a sunny place, went up to him and congratulated him on his physical well-being and the good feeding that he enjoyed. But later, when he saw him carrying a heavy burden and his driver following behind and beating him with a club, he said to the tame ass, "Oho! I'm not congratulating you any more, for I see that the abundance you enjoy is at the cost of great woes."
>
> (Transl. Perry)

There are two parts to the episode in *Act. Thom.* In the first one, the animals show their intelligence and understanding but do not speak. This could be understood as a miracle, that is, as the way someone with divine power can subjugate nature. But in the second part of the episode a wild ass speaks, and with superior knowledge (as in the case of the colt), but also with divine power. He addresses not the Apostle, as in the former episode, but the evil spirits, the enemies of Jesus, who have possessed the body of a woman. At first it is not the Apostle, but the ass

18 For the Christian interpretation of the ass as a humble animal in Augustine, i.e. two centuries later, see Cox Miller 2018, 53.

19 Spittler 2008, 203 and 208, following Bornkamm 1933, 35.

20 Cf. Adrados 1985, 218.

who addresses the devil. His speech is long and aggressive: thus he is an animal with authority, a feature not present in Act 4, where the colt was humble. At the end of this first speech, the onager directly embodies the personality of Thomas, even if in the third person. The Apostle has not yet said a word. He will confirm the exorcism with a few words after the onager's speech, but the first command to abandon the woman's body does not come from him, but from the wild ass in the Apostle's name. A couple of pages later, when the demons have already left the woman and the scene, the onager addresses the Apostle and bids Thomas to follow his mission and afterwards he addresses the whole audience (which has witnessed the miraculous healing of the possessed woman), explaining the difference between false and true prophets, using a very common image: a false apostle is like a wolf covered with a sheep's skin, greedy, ambitious, and mendacious.

What kind of resonance would this episode evoke in the audience of *Act. Thom.*? Spittler[21] read the episode in terms of sexual continence (Encratism), quoting *Physiologus* 9, where onagers castrate their offspring. Even if the text of the *Physiologus* points towards an issue of male power rather than of continence, in our opinion, this interpretation is possible.[22] But if the *Physiologus* is to be taken as a reference point, there is another significant text about the same animal, *Physiologus* 45, where the onager is called a devil because he is the impersonation of the night and therefore has a bad reputation, more consonant with the serpent than the ass in the *Act. Thom.*

On the other hand, Oenomaus (*fr*. 12.41), followed by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep*. *evang*. 5.34.3), places onagers at an almost immortal level. Certainly, these texts are displaying a disdain for boxers and their being considered divine beings: onagers could do as well, the writers say, and so would asses. But the comparison with the ass in these texts points towards the previously mentioned contempt for asses as stupid animals: "Asses could do as well as you do!" Onagers, in the context, play a more distinguished role: if asses are supposed to be gods, onagers are the best of the gods. Regardless of the castigation, this text is interesting because it stresses a qualitative difference between asses and onagers: wild asses are nobler, more elevated, more cultivated beings than domestic donkeys. The text of *Act. Thom.* may be based on this difference. The donkey of Act 4, however aristocratic his biblical ancestors were, is a domestic animal, destined to carry someone on his

21 Spittler 2008, 214–216.

22 Nevertheless, the onager is not always considered a chaste animal, especially according to Opp. *Cyn*. 3.191–193, where he states that they are ζηλήμονα ("prone to jealousy") and that they are πολλαῖσίν τ' ἀλόχοισιν ἀγαλλόμενοι ("glorying in many wives"; transl. Mair), which would rather support an interpretation of *Physiologus* 9 in terms of male power rather than continence.

back, as he is destined to carry all kinds of burdens, according to many Aesopic fables. His wisdom (contrasting with his supposed stupidity) allows him to recognize the superiority of Thomas the Apostle, and so to ask him for the honour of being ridden by the Apostle of Christ. This is its greater achievement; his confession of faith has no other aim than to show the clumsiness of human beings who are not capable of recognizing the servant of God when they see him. The clear-sightedness of the ass, a stupid animal, is opposed to the stupidity of men, usually considered the most intelligent beings. The wild asses of Act 8, on the other hand, go a step further. Occupying a higher position than their domestic relatives, they (or rather he, since there is only one onager speaks, but on behalf of all of them) are entitled to speak on behalf of the Apostle himself, to address demons, and, finally, to summon the Apostle and instruct the audience. They are equipped with a higher wisdom and, above all, with power. It is possible that the bad reputation conveyed by *Physiologus* 45 also plays a role in this: the incarnation of the devil is capable of calling out demons as soon as he has reversed his foul condition and acknowledged the true Christ. Nevertheless, we do not think too much attention should be paid to this passage of the *Physiologus*, given its connections with astrology and Egyptian science, although we cannot reject it altogether either.

As in fable 183 P., quoted above, wild asses are free, and freedom is one of their most praised qualities, far removed from the poor enslaved asses. And, just as onagers are free, so are Christians who have fully devoted themselves to the doctrine, and this freedom supplies them with extra wisdom and power.

2.3 The snake

On the other hand, Act 31 features another speaking animal, but of a very different sort, the snake, δράκων μέγας. It is hardly necessary to describe his negative connotations in Christian literature: a snake led Eve (and Adam) astray in Paradise, and a similar snake is the monster of the Book of Revelation. They are no better in Greek literature: snakes do not have a good reputation (although in Greek mythology, where ambiguity is strong, we could nuance this statement). A δράκων or its relatives is usually a hostile being, the antagonist of the heroes: Pytho, killed by Apollo; the snake of the Hesperides guarding the golden apples stolen by Heracles; the snake of Colchis guarding the Golden Fleece and killed by Jason; the snakes in the basket kept by the Aglaurides in Athens; the snakes at Heracles birth, etc. In this case, the Greeks had no need to change their minds when becoming Christians. Snakes were foul, and they could even incarnate the Devil himself, when it came to give a shape to evil. In fables, perfidy and treachery win over the poor innocent animals, as in Aesop. 192 P. [= 206 Hsr.; 286 Ch.] and

especially 196 P. [= 211 Hsr.; 290 Ch.] and 221 P. [= 248 Hsr.; 122 Ch.], and Babr. 118. Embodying evil is also the snakes' role in fables, and we may perhaps quote Aesop. 221 P. as an outstanding example:

> τοῦ Διὸς γαμοῦντος πάντα τὰ ζῷα ἀνήνεγκαν δῶρα. ὄφις δὲ ἕρπων ῥόδον ἀναλαβὼν τῷ στόματι ἀνέβη. ἰδὼν δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ Ζεὺς εἶπε· "τῶν ἄλλων ἁπάντων καὶ ἐκ ποδῶν δῶρα δέχομαι· ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ σοῦ στόματος οὐδὲν λαμβάνω."
>
> (Aesop. 221 P. [= 248 Hsr.; 122 Ch.])

> When Zeus married, all the animals brought gifts to his wedding. Among them was a snake, who, taking a rose in his mouth, crept up to Olympus. On seeing him Zeus said: "From all the others I accept gifts, even when presented by their feet, but from your mouth I take nothing."
>
> (Transl. Perry)

The animal in the text of *Act. Thom.* is not different; the snake is really a foe, and he is called so from the start, in Act 32. The Adversary does not act through any living creature but that one. Nevertheless, the speaking snake utters a speech that is worth looking at. We would expect rage and fury from his words, denial and insult, yet the terms of the conversation with the Apostle are quite different. In Act 33, he starts with a proud enumeration of the deeds of his ancestors (as the ass does in Act 4), including an interesting description of cosmological serpents, probably originating in a Gnostic[23] milieu and not unknown to the Greeks.[24]

> Ἐγὼ ἑρπυστὴς ἑρπυστοῦ φύσεως καὶ βλαπτικὸς βλαπτικοῦ· υἱός εἰμι ἐκείνου τοῦ βλάψαντος καὶ πλήξαντος τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀδελφοὺς τοὺς ἑστῶτας· υἱός εἰμι ἐκείνου τοῦ καθεζομένου ἐπὶ θρόνου εἰς τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν, τοῦ τὰ ἴδια λαμβάνοντος ἀπὸ τῶν δανειζομένων· υἱός εἰμι ἐκείνου τοῦ τὴν σφαῖραν ζωννύοντος· συγγενὴς δέ εἰμι ἐκείνου τοῦ ἔξωθεν τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ ὄντος, οὗ ἡ οὐρὰ ἔγκειται τῷ ἰδίῳ στόματι· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ διὰ τοῦ φραγμοῦ εἰσελθὼν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ καὶ μετὰ Εὔας λαλήσας ὅσα ὁ πατήρ μου ἐνετείλατό μοι λαλῆσαι αὐτῇ· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐξάψας καὶ πυρώσας Κάϊν ἵνα ἀποκτείνῃ τὸν ἴδιον ἀδελφόν, καὶ δι' ἐμὲ ἄκανθαι καὶ τρίβολοι ἐφύησαν ἐν τῇ γῇ·ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ἄνωθεν κάτω ῥίψας καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν γυναικῶν αὐτοὺς καταδήσας, ἵνα γηγενεῖς παῖδες ἐξ αὐτῶν γένωνται καὶ τὸ θέλημά μου ἐν αὐτοῖς διαπράξωμαι· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τὴν καρδίαν Φαραὼ σκληρύνας, ἵνα τὰ τέκνα τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ φονεύσῃ καὶ ἐν ζυγῷ σκληρότητος καταδουλώσηται αὐτούς· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τὸ πλῆθος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ πλανήσας, ὅτε τὸν μόσχον ἐποίησαν· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τὸν Ἡρώδην πυρώσας καὶ τὸν Καϊάφαν ἐξάψας ἐν τῇ ψευδηγορίᾳ τοῦ ψεύδους ἐπὶ Πιλάτου· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐμοὶ ἔπρεπεν· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τὸν Ἰούδαν ἐξάψας καὶ ἐξαγοράσας ἵνα τὸν Χριστὸν θανάτῳ παραδῷ· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ τὴν ἄβυσσον τοῦ ταρτάρου

23 Among some of the Gnostic sects, the evil god or demiurge adopted the form of a serpent. There was a strong controversy in the first two centuries CE concerning Gnostics, considered to be heretics by the orthodox Church. Some groups were called Ophites or Ophians because of the speculations about the serpent in Genesis.

24 Adamik 2001, 118: "the speech […] is a complex treatise on the serpent."

οἰκῶν καὶ κατέχων, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἄκοντά με ἠδίκησεν καὶ τοὺς ἰδίους ἐξ ἐμοῦ ἐξελέξατο· συγγενής εἰμι ἐκείνου τοῦ μέλλοντος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνατολῆς ἔρχεσθαι, ᾧ καὶ ἐξουσία δίδοται ποιῆσαι ὅπερ αὐτὸς βούλεται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

(*Act. Thom.* 32)

I am a reptile, the son of reptile, and harmer, the son of harmer: I am the son of him, to whom power was given over (all) creatures, and he troubled them. I am the son of him, who makes himself like to God to those who obey him, that they may do his will. I am the son of him, who is ruler over everything that is created under heaven. I am the son of him, who is outside of the ocean, and whose mouth is closed. I am the kinsman of him, who spoke with Eve, and through her made Adam transgress the commandment of God. And I am he who incited Cain to slay his brother. And on my account, — because of this I was created, — the earth was cursed and thorns grew up in it. I am he who dared, and cast down the just from their height, and corrupted them through the lust of women; and they begat some large of body, and I worked in them my will. And I am he who hardened the heart of Pharaoh, that he might slay the children of Israel, and keep them down in hard slavery. I am he who led the people astray in the desert, when I subdued them so that they made for themselves the calf. I am he who stirred up Caiaphas and Herod by slander against the righteous Judge. I am he who caused Judas to take the bribe, when he was made subject to me, that he might deliver up the Messiah to death. I am he to whom the power of this world was given, and the son of Mary[25] has seized me by force and taken what was his from me. I am the kinsman of him, who is to come from the east, to whom the power is given.

(Transl. Klijn)

The text of *Act. Thom.* has a strong inclination towards Gnostic ideas, especially regarding Encratism and a certain contempt for matter, but it is firmly embedded in a Christian cosmology. This text may also bear witness to a certain struggle with — or deviance from — other more exaggerated Gnostic trends of the 2nd century. Gnosticism is a modern word in general use by scholars, but it does not refer to ancient reality with great accuracy. This is not the proper place to discuss the Gnostic content of *Act. Thom.*, but the passage helps to stress the differences from some old cosmologies that involved snakes.

After recalling all the superb — and ominous — deeds of its ancestors, starting from the cosmogonic snake up to the biblical ones, such as the one in Paradise, and from there to the betrayal of Judas, the snake mentions the Son of God, who took some of his followers from among its companions, against its own will. This point seems interesting: the evil nature of the animal persists, but its words show not only submission, but also recognition of the power of Christ. One would expect denial; instead, the snake agrees — even if reluctantly — that Christ is the Son of

25 The Greek text says “the Son of God”; Klijn translates “the Son of Mary”, matching other passages, cf. Klijn 2003, 95 and 226.

God and that the Apostle acts on his behalf. He obeys the order of the Apostle (to suck the venom from a young man's wound), even if it means his own death, but he utters another similar message first: οὔπω ὁ καιρὸς ἔφθασεν τοῦ τέλους ἡμῶν ("The time of our end has not arrived yet", *Act. Thom.* 33). There is a time for its end and for all the creatures of its family. It will end πρὸ καιροῦ ("before time", *Act. Thom.* 33), i.e. he acknowledges the superior power of Christ (or the Apostle). His lineage is enslaved to the Christian God, as he has already acknowledged in Act 31:

> [...] καὶ ἀκολουθήσας αὐτῇ ἐπετήρουν· καὶ εὗρον τοῦτον τὸν νεανίαν καταφιλοῦντα αὐτήν, ὃς καὶ ἐκοινώνησεν αὐτῇ καὶ ἄλλα αἰσχρὰ διεπράξατο μετ' αὐτῆς· κάμοὶ μὲν εὔκολα ἦν αὐτὰ ἐπὶ σοῦ ἐκφᾶναι, οἶδα γάρ σε δίδυμον ὄντα τοῦ Χριστοῦ [there is a Syriac variant] τὸν τὴν φύσιν ἡμῶν ἀεὶ καταργοῦντα· ταράξαι δὲ ταύτην μὴ βουληθεὶς αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ οὐκ ἐθανάτωσα αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἐπιτηρησάμενος αὐτὸν ἐσπέρας διερχόμενον τύψας ἐθανάτωσα αὐτόν, καὶ μάλιστα κατατολμήσαντα αὐτὸν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦτο διαπράξασθαι.
>
> (*Act. Thom.* 31)

> [...] and I went after her, and saw the youth kissing her, and he also slept with her, and did other things with her which are unseemly, — easy for me (to say), but to you I do not dare to utter them, because I know that the ocean-flood of the Messiah will destroy our nature.[26] And in order that I might not alarm her, I did not kill him at that time, but I watched him, and in the evening, when he passed by me, I struck him, and killed him, and especially because he had dared to do this thing on the Sunday".
>
> (Transl. Klijn)

It is a new telling of the usual myth, where heroes fight snakes and kill or defeat them, but here the weapon is neither a sword nor a poison but the commanding word of the Apostle. At the same time, it is the reversal of the popular tales about snakes, as quoted above. In *Act. Thom.*, the snake is defeated, he acknowledges a superior power capable of beating his treachery, he confesses the faith, even if against his own will. In fact, all these texts are evidence of a struggle for power, the power of Christian characters over the different magicians, fortune tellers, and miracle workers (θαυματουργοί) who belong to the evil side. The δράκων, among all living creatures, is the best incarnation of this evil, and therefore his submission to the Apostle means acknowledgement of the true power. The texts may have a strong Gnostic flavour, but they are certainly not Manichaean: there is a supreme power, the new God, who defeats all other gods and demons. This is the

26 The Greek text says "for I know that you are the twin brother of Christ"; Klijn (2003, 92) translates the text according to the Syriac variant "the ocean-flood of the Messiah". About the Greek or Syrian origin of *Act. Thom.*, cf. n. 7. Both readings are useful for our purpose.

Christian message since Paul (*Ep.Col.* 1.16). The contrast with tradition in this case lies not in the image that the snake may evoke, since he still personifies evil, but in his submission to a superior being, his confession of faith that places him on the other side, even in spite of himself. This is not a unique case; on the contrary, in early Christian texts it is not uncommon to find the discourse of faith in the mouth of the adversaries,[27] but in *Act. Thom.* such an attitude, apparently opposed to what the animal represented, must have been particularly surprising. For some Church Fathers, animals were already a cliché, they already attributed to them qualities that configured a more-or-less fixed character. Clement of Alexandria[28] compares mankind to animals, according to their faults rather than their qualities, and Tertullian, the great detractor of pantomime and theatrical performances — which must have been the major transmitters of popular clichés across all social classes — uses animals to express his displeasure.[29]

3 Intelligent animals?

We might also bear in mind that among the Greeks there was an intellectual debate over animal rationality.[30] According to Aristotle's *De anima*,[31] animals do not have intellect, νοῦς, but in *Historia animalium* he supposes that many animals have something like intelligent understanding: τῆς περὶ τὴν διάνοιαν συνέσεως ἔνεισιν ἐν πολλοῖς αὐτῶν ὁμοιότητες ("present in many of them together with resemblances of intelligent understanding", Arist. *Hist. an.* 588a23–24; transl. Balme), or in 612a he says that other animals use intelligence for their benefit: ποιεῖ πρὸς βοήθειαν αὐτοῖς φρονίμως ("many other animals [...] act intelligently too to help themselves", Arist. *Hist. an.* 612a; transl. Balme). On the other hand, Stoics deny that animals possess any reason. Epictetus says:

> ὁ ὄνος ἐπεὶ γέγονεν μή τι προηγουμένως; οὔ: ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι νώτου χρείαν. εἴχομεν βαστάζειν τι δυναμένου. ἀλλὰ νὴ Δία καὶ περιπατοῦντος αὐτοῦ χρείαν εἴχομεν: διὰ τοῦτο προσείληφε καὶ τὸ χρῆσθαι φαντασίαις: ἄλλως γὰρ περιπατεῖν οὐκ ἐδύνατο. [8] καὶ λοιπὸν αὐτοῦ που πέπαυται. εἰ δὲ καὶ αὐτός που προσειλήφει παρακολούθησιν τῇ χρήσει τῶν φαντασιῶν, καὶ

27 One of the best examples, although probably later than *Act. Thom.*, is the apocryphal *Descent of Christ into the Underworld*, in which Hades and Death acknowledge the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

28 Clem. Al. *Protr.* 1.4.1.

29 Tert. *De spect.* 2.1; 8.1.

30 For a broad overview of the subject, see Gilhus 2006, 37–63.

31 Arist. *De an.* 414b and 429a.

> δῆλον ὅτι κατὰ λόγον οὐκέτ᾽ ἂν ἡμῖν ὑπετέτακτο οὐδὲ τὰς χρείας ταύτας παρεῖχεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἦν ἂν ἴσος ἡμῖν καὶ ὅμοιος.
>
> (Arr. *Epict. diss.* 2.8.7–8)

> The ass, for example, is not born to be of primary importance, is it? No, but because we had need of a back that was able to carry something. But, by Zeus, we had need that it should also be able to walk around: therefore, it has further received the faculty of using external impressions; for otherwise it would not be able to walk around. And at about that stage there was an end. But if it, like man, had somehow received the faculty of understanding the use of its external impressions, it is also clear that consequently it would no longer be subject to us, nor would it be performing these services, but would be our equal and our peer.
>
> (Transl. Oldfather)

Could the speaking animals of *Act. Thom.* be something like 'rational' or at least 'intelligent' animals, capable of reasoning because they are almost equal to men? Or perhaps, since, they have the power of speech, they may indeed be equal to men, as Epictetus says? It is possible that there is some echo of these intellectual debates in the background of the Acts, since while their style may be uncomplicated, their doctrine is rather sophisticated. If among the Gnostics there was a debate on all the ζῷα — the living beings, that is, the animals — and if this was not only the particular concern of Epiphanes and Carpocrates,[32] it would be quite easy to give the power of speech to certain animals, just to blur the apparent boundaries between irrational animals and mankind. This could easily be the case of *Act. Philipp.* for instance, but it could also apply to the other Acts. The ass and the onagers in *Act. Thom.* have somehow received the faculty of understanding, and they have become the equals of humans or, even better, the teachers of humans. Although in *Act. Thom.* there are no eucharistic animals as in *Act. Philipp.*, the same message of a global nature is conveyed.[33]

4 The literary background of *Act. Thom.*

Nevertheless, the possible audience of *Act. Thom.* probably had a strongly popular background rather than an intellectual one. The Acts tell stories that could be understood at different levels, from the enigmatic hidden meanings of allegory or metaphors to the plain story of a narrative plot with a certain moral.

32 Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.2. Cf. Camps-Gaset 2022.

33 Matthews 1999.

Aristophanes, the Aesopic corpus, but also Apuleius and Lucian, creators of the two most famous asses in literature, are the background of the Greek audience. These are not 'popular' writers, if there is such a category, but they belong to general knowledge or to the common reference points of literature. Their plays and stories could be told and retold, rearranged, and performed on stage in different ways, in which mime and pantomime should not be excluded; both oral tradition and written memorization played a role in the transmission of these texts. The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius were not even one hundred years older than the *Act. Thom.*, and a similar thing could probably be said about the pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*.[34] Whoever listened to the marvellous speaking ass and his noble lineage could not have helped but recall what kind of characters asses really were. The contrast to the pious and wise onagers, or to the obedient and devoted colt, would have been all the more striking.[35]

These stories with speaking animals have morals. In the three cases, there is a kind of epimythium. The first is the speech of Thomas at the end of Act 4, when the donkey dies after fulfilling its mission. Spittler's claim that his domestic condition as a lower and uninitiated creature brings about his death, in contrast to the onagers, may not be apt:[36] on the contrary, in our opinion, the colt dies because he could never do anything better than what he has done as a donkey, carrying the Apostle on his back! The second one is the speech of Thomas at the end of Act 8, when he confirms with his authority the last words of the onagers, and the third one is the end of Act 3, when the snake dies of its own poison, as bad animals should, but especially as the Lord of the snakes himself (i.e. the Evil Spirit) will die when his time comes. These speaking animals are a way to represent otherness, since they do not belong to ordinary life; rather, they reverse the natural order of things. It is not humans but animals who acknowledge the true faith, in contrast to human clumsiness, and not just any animal, but the ones with a strong background in the Greek imagination.

It is difficult to speak of cultivated education related to the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. The text does not manifest any sophistic *paideia*, nor does it exhibit any quotations from classical texts except some biblical references. What is new in these texts is the Christian approach, not the general frame of plot and story-

34 On connections between these works and the fables of Phaedrus, see also Mattiacci's contribution in this volume.

35 It is also particularly important to stress that the different collections of fables such as those of Phaedrus, Babrius, or the *Collectio Augustana* originated in the same period (between the 1st and 3rd century) and were available to the same audience.

36 Spittler 2008, 220–221.

telling. The Christian Scriptures (that is, the Jewish texts interpreted in a Christian way and the new texts of the Gospels and Paul's Epistles) were entering collective memory and gradually taking over the space that Greek education had previously occupied. For literate and cultivated circles, Greek παιδεία always maintained its privileged situation, even when replaced by a Christian point of view. But for the poorer groups of the population, education was markedly oral and took place in the preaching of the churches and in the narratives (written or oral) that gradually took the place of the old novels and the adventures of pagan heroes. However, Babrius' fables are contemporary with the Second Sophistic, and it is possible to conceive a relation to the sophistic concept of *paideia*. Nor should we underestimate the power of pantomime or mime and theatre, where the characters were clearly predefined, and comedy was strong. Tertullian, the great detractor of the stage, mentions the role of horses in chariot races and the mythological role of some animals in performances.[37] The animals quoted in the *Act. Thom.* are different, but they could just as well be a part of traditional performances (and surely asses were, as a source of comic elements).

5 Conclusion

The *Act. Thom.* convey a strong doctrinal meaning by recalling biblical stories, but especially by reversing the usual well-known framework of popular references transmitted in fable collections of the Imperial period, among other places. Animals, as part of the Creation, play an important role in them but not the expected role. The whole of nature is turned upside down, animals can speak and have λόγος, a type of reason that ordinary humans lack. It is a tale of wisdom and clumsiness as well as of power, where the usual characters act in a very different and unexpected way. The biblical allusions here are a novelty, which contrasts with preconceived notions about animals. Otherness is represented by the use of irrational beings playing a role opposite to their usual one in fables, even in the case of the serpent, who maintains his negative condition but becomes the herald of the new faith. At a time when collective referents were changing, and not only Christian thought but also the popular use of mental images was progressively developing, the text of the Acts must have been all the more significant for its contrast with tradition.

37 Tert. *De spect.* 8.1.

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